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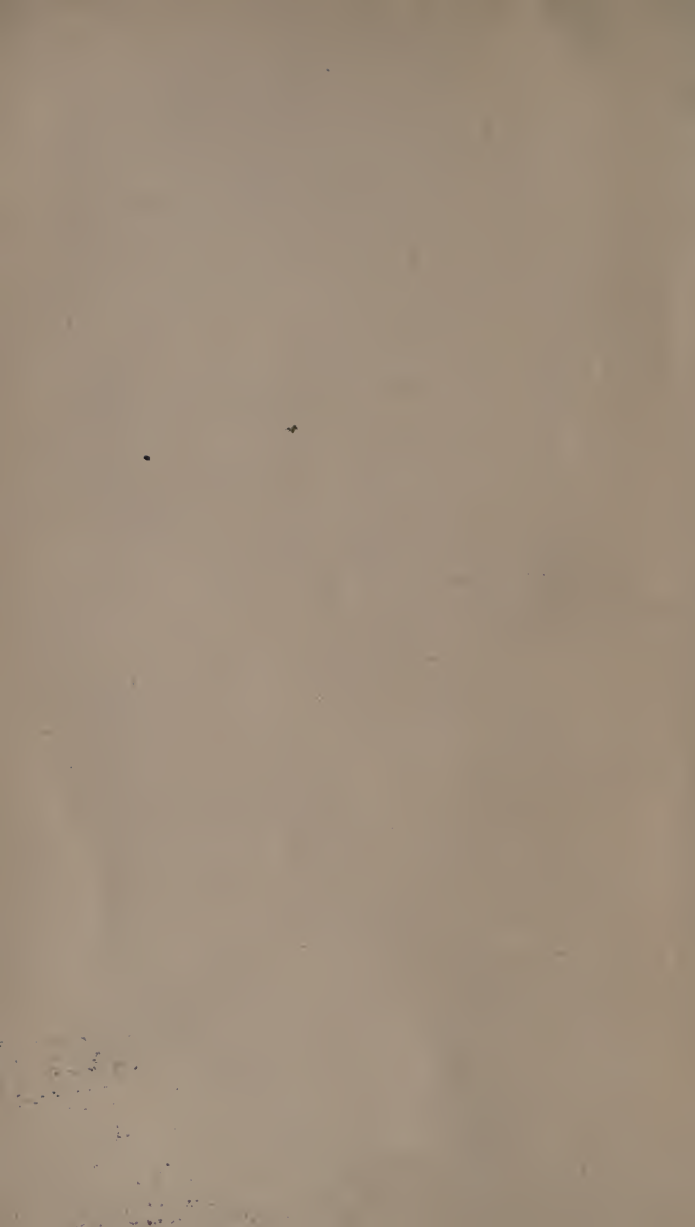
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IGNORANT ESSAYS.



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IGNORANT

ESSAYS.

by
Richard Dowling



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LONDON :

WARD AND DOWNEY,

12, YORK STREET, COVENT-GARDEN, W.C.

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RICHARD CLAY AND SONS,
LONDON AND BUNGAY.

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IGNORANT ESSAYS.

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THE ONLY REAL GHOST IN FICTION.

MY most ingenious friend met me one day, and asked me whether I considered I should be richer if I had the ghost of sixpence or if I had not the ghost of sixpence.

“What side do you take?” I inquired, for I knew his disputatious turn.

“I am ready to take either,” he answered; “but I give preference to the ghost.”

“What!” I said. “Give preference to the ghost!”

“Yes. You see, if I haven’t the ghost of

sixpence I have nothing at all; but if I have the ghost of a sixpence——”

“ Well ? ”

“ Well, I am the richer by having the ghost of a sixpence.”

“ And do you think when you add one more delusion to those under which you already labour ”—he and I could never agree about the difference between infinity and zero—“ that you will be the better off ? ”

“ I have not admitted a ghost is a delusion; and even if I had I am not prepared to grant that a delusion may not be a source of wealth. Look at the South Sea Bubble.”

I was willing, so there and then we fell to and were at the question—or rather, the questions to which it led—for hours, until we finally emerged upon the crystallization of cast-iron, the possibility of a Napoleonic restoration, or some other kindred matter. How we wandered about and writhed in that talk I can no more remember than I can recall the first articulate words that fell into my life. I know we handled ghosts (it was broad day and in a public street)

with a freedom and familiarity that must have been painful to spirits of refinement and reserve. I know we said much about dreams, and compared the phantoms of the open lids with the phantoms of the closed eyes, and pitted them one against another like cocks in a main, and I remember that the case of the dreamer in Boswell's Johnson came up between us. The case in Boswell submitted to Johnson as an argument in favour of a man's reason being more acute in sleep than in waking, showed the phantom antagonistic able to floor the dreamer in his proper person. Johnson laughed at such a delusion, for, he pointed out, only the dreamer was besotted with sleep he would have perceived that he himself had furnished the confounding arguments to the shadowy disputant. That is very good, and seems quite conclusive as far as it goes ; but is there nothing beyond what Johnson saw ? Was there no ghostly prompter in the scene ? No *suggestitore* invisible and inaudible to the dreamer, who put words and notes into the mouth of the opponent ? No thinner shade than the spectral being visible in the dream ? If in our waking

hours we are subject to phantoms which sometimes can be seen and sometimes cannot, why not in our sleeping hours also? Are all ghosts of like grossness, or do some exist so fine as to be beyond our carnal apprehension, and within the ken only of the people of our sleep? If we ponderable mortals are haunted, who can say that our insubstantial midnight visitors may not know wraiths finer and subtler than we, may not be haunted as we are? In physical life parasites have parasites. Why in phantom life should not ghosts have ghosts?

The firm, familiar earth—our earth of this time, the earth upon which we each of us stand at this moment—is thickly peopled with living tangible folk who can eat, and drink, and talk, and sing, and walk, and draw cheques, and perform a number of other useful, and hateful, and amusing actions. In the course of a day a man meets, let us say, forty people, with whom he exchanges speech. If a man is a busy dreamer, with how many people in the course of one night does he exchange speech? Ten, a hundred, a thousand? In the dreaming of one

minute by the clock a man may converse with half the children of Adam since the Fall ! The command of the greatest general alive would not furnish sentries and vedettes for the army of spirits that might visit one man in the interval between one beat of the pendulum of Big Ben and another !

Shortly after that talk with my friend about the ghost of the sixpence, I was walking alone through one of the narrow lanes in the tangle of ways between Holborn and Fleet Street, when my eye was caught by the staring white word "Dreams" on a black ground. The word is, so to speak, printed in white on the black cover of a paper-bound book, and under the word "Dreams" are three faces, also printed in white on a black ground. Two of the faces are those of women: one of a young woman, purporting to be beautiful, with a star close to her forehead, and the other of a witch with the long hair and disordered eyes becoming to a person of her occupation. I dare say these two women are capable not only of justification, but of the simplest explanation. For all I know

to the contrary, the composition may be taken wholly, or in part, from a well-known picture, or perhaps some canon of ghostly lore would be violated if any other design appeared on the cover. About such matters I know absolutely nothing. The word "Dreams" and the two female faces are now much less prominent than when I saw the book first, for, Goth that I am, long ago I dipped a brush in ink and ran a thin wash over the letters and the two faces; as they were, to use artist's phrases, in front of the third face, and killing it.

The third face is that of a man, a young man clean shaven and handsome, with no ghastliness or look of austerity. His arms are resting on a ledge, and extend from one side of the picture to the other. The left arm lies partly under the right, and the left hand is clenched softly and retired in half shadow. The right arm rises slightly as it crosses the picture, and the right wrist and hand ride on the left. The fore and middle fingers are apart, and point forward and a little downward, following the sleeve of the other arm. The third finger droops

still more downward, and the little finger, with a ring ^{*}on it, lies directly perpendicular along the cuff of the sleeve beneath. The hand is not well drawn, and yet there is some weird suggestiveness in the purposeless dispersion of the fingers.

Fortunately upon my coming across the book, the original cost of which was one shilling, I had more than the ghost of a sixpence, and for two-thirds of that sum the book became mine. It is the only art purchase I ever made on the spur of the moment; I knew nothing of the book then, and know little of it now. It says it is the cut-down edition of a much larger work, and what I have read of it is foolish. The worst of the book is that it does not afford subject for a laugh. Thomas Carlyle is reported to have said in conversation respecting one of George Eliot's latest stories that "it was not amusing, and it was not instructive; it was only dull—dull." This book of dreams is only dull. However, there are some points in it that may be referred to, as this is an idle time.

“To dream you see an angel or angels is very good, and to dream that you yourself are one is much better.” The noteworthy thing in connection with this passage being that nothing is said of the complexion of the angel or angels! Black or white it is all the same. You have only to dream of them and be happy. “To dream that you play upon bagpipes, signifies trouble, contention, and being overthrown at law.” Doubtless from the certainty, in civilised parts, of being prosecuted by your neighbours as a public nuisance. I would give a trifle to know a man who did dream that he played upon the bagpipes. Of course, it is quite possible he might be an amiable man in other ways.

“To dream you have a beard long, thick, and unhandsome is of a good signification to an orator, or an ambassador, lawyer, philosopher, or any who desires to speak well or to learn arts and sciences.” That “ambassador” gleams like a jewel among the other homely folk. I remember once seeing a newspaper contents-bill after a dreadful accident with the words,

“Death of fifty-seven people and a peer.” “To dream that you have a brow of brass, copper, marble, or iron signifies irreconcilable hatred against your enemies.” The man capable of such a dream I should like to see—but through bars of metal made from his own sleep-zoned forehead. “If any one dreams that he hath encountered a cat or killed one, he will commit a thief to prison and prosecute him to the death; for the cat signifies a common thief.” Mercy on us ! Does the magistrate who commits usually prosecute, and is thieving a hanging matter now ? This is necromancy or nothing ; prophecy, inspiration, or something out of the common indeed.

“To dream one plays or sees another play on a clavicord, shows the death of relations, or funeral obsequies.” I now say with feelings of the most profound gratitude that I never to my knowledge even saw a clavicord. I do not know what the beastly, ill-omened contrivance is like. The most recondite musical instrument I ever remember to have performed on is the Jew’s harp ; and although there seems to be some-

thing weak, uncandid and treacherous in the spelling of "clavicord," I presume the two are not identical. In any case I am safe, for I have never dreamed of playing even on the Jew's harp. Here however is a cheerful promise from a painful experience—one wants something encouraging after that terrifying "clavicord." "For a man to dream that his flesh is full of corns, shows that a man will grow rich proportionately to his corns." I can breathe freely once more, having got away from outlandish musical instruments and within the influence of the familiar horn.

As might be expected, it is not useful to dream about the devil. Let sleeping dogs lie. "To dream of eating human flesh" is also a bad way of spending the hours of darkness. It is lucky to dream you are a fool. You see, even in sleep, the virtue of candour brings reward. "To dream that you lose your keys signifies anger." And very naturally too. "To dream you kill your father is a bad sign." I had made up my mind not to go beyond the parricide, but I am lured on to quote this, "To dream of eating

mallows, signifies exemption from trouble and dispatch of business, because this herb renders the body soluble." I will not say that Nebuchadnezzar may not at one time have eaten mallows among other unusual herbs, but I never did. That however is not where the wonder creeps in. It is at the reason. If you eat mallows you will have no trouble *because* this herb renders the body *soluble*. Why is it good to render the body soluble, and what is the body soluble in? One more and I am done. "To dream one plays, or sees another play, upon the virginals, signifies the death of relations, or funeral obsequies." From bagpipes, clavicords, and virginals, we hope we may be protected. And yet if these are the only instruments banned, a person having an extensive acquaintance with wind and string instruments of the orchestra may be musical in slumber without harm to himself or threat to his friends.

In the interpretation of dreams Artemidorus was the most learned man that ever lived. He gave the best part of his life to collecting matter about dreams, and this he afterwards

put together in five books. He might better have spent his time in bottling shadows of the moon.

It was however for the face of the man on the cover that I bought and have kept the book. The face is that of a man between thirty and thirty-five years of age. It is regular and handsome. The forehead leans slightly forward, and the lower part of the face is therefore a little foreshortened. It is looking straight out of the picture; the shadows fall on the left of the face, on the right as it fronts you. The nose is as long and broad-backed as the nose of the Antinous. The mouth is large and firm and well-shaping with lips neither thick nor thin. The interval between the nostrils and verge of the upper lip is short. The chin is gently pointed and prominent. The outline of the jaws square. The modelling of the left cheek is defectively emphasised at the line from above the hollow of the nostrils downward and backward. The brows are straight, the left one being slightly more arched than the right. The forehead is low, broad, compact, hard, with

clear lines. The lower line of the temples projects beyond the perpendicular. The hair is thick and wavy and divided at the left side, depressed rather than divided, for the parting is visible no further up the head than a splay letter V.

The eyes are wide open, and notwithstanding the obtuse angle made by the facial line in the forward pose of the head, they are looking out level with their own height upon the horizon. There is no curiosity or speculation in the eyes. There is no wonder or doubt; no fear or joy. The gaze is heavy. There is a faint smile, the faintest smile the human face is capable of displaying, about the mouth. There is no light in the eyes. The expression of the whole face is infinitely removed from sinister. In it there is kindness with a touch of wisdom and pity. It asks no question; desires to say no word. It is the face of one who beyond all doubt knows things we do not know, things which can scarcely be shaped into words, things we are in ignorance of. It is not the face of a charlatan, a seer, or a prophet.

It is the face of a man once ardent and hopeful, to whom everything that is to be known has lately been revealed, and who has come away from the revelation with feelings of unassuageable regret and sorrow for Man. It says with terrible calmness, "I have seen all, and there is nothing in it. For your own sakes let me be mute. Live you your lives. *Miserere nobis!*"

My belief is that the extraordinary expression of that face is an accident, a happy chance, a result that the artist never foresaw. Who drew the cover I cannot tell. No initials appear on it and I have never made inquiries. Remember that in pictures and poems (I know nothing of music), what is a miracle to you, has in most cases been a miracle to the painter or poet also. Any poet can explain how he makes a poem, but no poet can explain how he makes poetry. He is simply writing a poem and the poetry glides or rushes in. When it comes he is as much astonished by it as you are. The poem may cost him infinite trouble, the poetry he gets as a free gift. He begins a poem to prepare him-

self for the reception of poetry or to induce its flow. His poem is only a lightning-rod to attract a fluid over which he has no control before it comes to him. There may be a poetic art, such as verse-making, but to talk about the art of poetry is to talk nonsense. It is men of genteel intellects who speak of the art of poetry. The man who wrote the *Art of Poetry* knew better than to credit the possible existence of any such art. He himself says the poet is born, not made.

I am very bad at dates, but I think Le Fanu wrote *Green Tea* before a whole community of Canadian nuns were thrown into the most horrible state of nervous misery by excessive indulgence in that drug. Of all the horrible tales that are not revolting, *Green Tea* is I think the most horrible. The bare statement that an estimable and pious man is haunted by the ghost of a monkey is at the first blush funny. But if you have not read the story read it, and see how little of fun is in it. The horror of the tale lies in the fact that this apparition of a monkey is the only *probable*

ghost in fiction. I have not the book by me as I write, and I cannot recall the victim's name, but he is a clergyman, and, as far as we know to the contrary, a saint. There is no reason *on earth* why he should be pursued by this malignant spectre. He has committed no crime, no sin even. He labours with all the sincerity of a holy man to regain his health and exorcise his foe. He is as crimeless as you or I and infinitely more faultless. He has not deserved his fate, yet he is driven in the end to cut his throat, and you excuse *that* crime by saying he is mad.

I do not think any additional force is gained in the course of this unique story by the importation of malignant irreverence to Christianity in the latter manifestations of the ape. I think the apparition is at its best and most terrible when it is simply an indifferent pagan, before it assumes the *rôle* of antichrist. This ape is at his best as a mind-destroyer when the clergyman, going down the avenue in the twilight, raised his eyes and finds the awful presence preceding him along the top of the

wall. There the clergyman reaches the acme of piteous, unsupportable horror. In the pulpit with the brute, the priest is fighting against the devil. In the avenue he has not the strengthening or consoling reflection that he is defending a cause, struggling against hell. The instant motive enters into the story the situation ceases to be dramatic and becomes merely theatrical. Every "converted" tinker will tell you stirring stories of his wrestling with Satan, forgetting that it takes two to fight, and what a loathsome creature he himself is. But the conflict between a good man and the unnecessary apparition of this ape is pathetic, horribly pathetic, and full of the dramatic despair of the finest tragedy.

It is desirable at this point to focus some scattered words that have been set down above. The reason this apparition of the ape appears probable is *because* it is unnecessary. Any one can understand why Macbeth should see that awful vision at the banquet. The apparition of the murdered dead is little more than was to be expected, and can be explained

in an easy fashion. You or I never committed murder, therefore we are not liable to be troubled by the ghost of Banquo. In your life or mine Nemesis is not likely to take heroic dimensions. The spectres of books, as a rule, only excite our imaginative fears, not our personal terrors. The spectres of books have and can have nothing to do with us any more than the sufferings of the Israelites in the desert. When a person of our acquaintance dies, we inquire the particulars of his disease, and then discover the predisposing causes, so that we may prove to ourselves we are not in the same category with him. We do not deny our liability to contract the disease, we deny our likelihood to supply the predisposing causes. He died of aneurysm of the aorta: Ah, we say, induced by the violent exercise he took—we never take violent exercise. If not of aneurysm of the aorta, but fatty degeneration of the heart: Ah, induced by the sedentary habits of his latter years—we take care to secure plenty of exercise. If a man has been careful of his health and dies, we allegé that he took all the robustness out of

his constitution by over-heedfulness ; if he has been careless, we say he took no precautions at all ; and from either of these extremes we are exempt, and therefore we shall live for ever.

Now here in this story of *Green Tea* is a ghost which is possible, probable, almost familiar. It is a ghost without genesis or justification. The gods have nothing to do with it. Something, an accident due partly to excessive tea-drinking, has happened to the clergyman's nerves, and the ghost of this ape glides into his life and sits down and abides with him. There is no reason why the ghost should be an ape. When the victim sees the apparition first he does not know it to be an ape. He is coming home in an omnibus one night and descries two gleaming spots of fire in the dark, and from that moment the life of the poor gentleman becomes a ruin. It is a thing that may happen to you or me any day, any hour. That is why Le Fanu's ghost is so horrible. You and I might drink green tea to the end of our days and suffer from nothing more than ordinary impaired digestion. But you or I may get a fall, or a sunstroke, and ever afterwards

have some hideous familiar. To say there can be no such things as ghosts is a paltry blasphemy. It is a theory of the smug, comfortable kind. A ghost need not wear a white sheet and have intelligible designs on personal property. A ghost need not be the spirit of a dead person. A ghost need have no moral mission whatever.

I once met a haunted man, a man who had seen a real ghost; a ghost that had, as the ape, no ascertainable moral mission but to drive his victim mad. In this case too the victim was a clergyman. He is, I believe, alive and well now. He has shaken off the incubus and walks a free man. I was travelling at the time, and accidentally got into chat with him on the deck of a steamboat by night. We were quite alone in the darkness and far from land when he told me his extraordinary story. I do not of course intend retailing it here. I look on it as a private communication. I asked him what brought him to the mental plight in which he had found himself, and he answered briefly, "Overwork." He was then convalescent, and had been assured by his physicians that with care

the ghost which had been laid would appear no more. The spectre he saw threatened physical harm, and while he was haunted by it he went in constant dread of death by violence. It had nothing good or bad to do with his ordinary life or his sacred calling. It had no foundation on fact, no basis on justice. He had been for months pursued by the figure of a man threatening to take away his life. He did not believe this man had any corporeal existence. He did not know whether the creature had the power to kill him or not. The figure was there in the attitude of menace and would not be banished. He knew that no one but himself could see the murderous being. That ghost was there for him, and there for him alone.

Respecting the Canadian nuns whose convent was beleaguered and infested by ghostly enemies that came not by ones or twos but in battalions, I had a fancy at the time. I do not intend using the terminologies or theories of the dissecting room, or the language of physiology found in books. I am not sure the fancy is wholly my own, but some of it is original.

I shall suppose that the nerves are not only capable of various conditions of health and disease, but of large structural alteration in life; structural alteration not yet recorded or observed in fact; structural alteration which, if you will, exists in life but disappears instantly at death. In fine, I mean rather to illustrate my fancy than to describe anything that exists or could exist. Before letting go the last strand of sense, let me say that talking of nerves being highly strung is sheer nonsense, and not good nonsense either. The muscles it is that are highly strung. The poor nerves are merely insulated wires from the battery in the head. Their tension is no more affected by the messages that go over them, than an Atlantic cable is tightened or loosened by the signals indicating fluctuations in the Stock Exchanges of London and New York.

The nerves, let us suppose, in their normal condition of health have three skins over the absolute sentient tissue. In the ideal man in perfect health, let us say Hodge, the man whose privilege it is to "draw nutrition, propagate, and

rot," the three skins are always at their thickest and toughest. Now genius is a disease, and it falls, as ladies of Mrs. Gamp's degree say, "on the nerves." That is, the first of these skins having been worn away or never supplied by nature, the patient "sees visions and dreams dreams." The man of genius is not exactly under delusions. He does not think he is in China because he is writing of Canton in London, but his optic nerve, wanting the outer coating, can build up images out of statistics until the images are as full of line and colour and as incapable of change at will as the image of a barrel of cider which occupies Hodge's retina when it is imminent to his desires, present to his touch. The sensibility of the nerves of genius is greater than the sensibility of the nerves of Hodge. Not all the eloquence of an unabridged dictionary could create an image in Hodge's mind of a thing he had never seen. From a brief description a painter of genius could make a picture—not a likeness of course—of Canton, although he had never been outside the four corners of these kingdoms.

The painting would not, in all likelihood, be in the least like Canton, but it would be very like the image formed in the painter's mind of that city. In the painter such an image comes and goes at will. He can either see it or not see it as he pleases. It is the result of the brain reacting on the nerve. It relies on data and combination. It is his slave, not his master. Before it can be formed there must be great increase of sensibility. Hodge is crude silver, the painter is the polished mirror. The painter can see things which are not, things which he himself makes in his mind. His invention is at least as vivid as his memory.

I suppose then that the man of genius, the painter or poet, is one who, having lost the first skin, or portion of the first skin of his nerves, can create and see in his mind's eye things never seen by the eye of any other man, and see them as vividly as men of no genius can see objects of memory.

Now peel off the second skin. The more exquisitely sensitive or the innermost skin of the nerve is exposed. Things which the eye of

genius could not invent or even dream of are revealed. A drop of putrid water under the microscope becomes a lake full of terrifying monsters large enough to destroy man. Heard through the microphone the sap ascending a tree becomes loud as a torrent. Seen through a telescope nebulous spots in the sky become clusters of constellations. Divested of its second skin the nerve becomes sensitive to influences too rare and fine for the perception of the optic nerve in a more protected state. Beings that bear no relation whatever to weight or the law of impenetrability, float about and flash hither and thither swifter than lightning. The air and other ponderable matter are nothing to them. They are no more than the shadows or reflections of action, the imperishable progeny of thought. Here lies disclosed to the partly emancipated nerve the Canton of the painter's vision. Here the city he made to himself is as firm and sturdy and solid and full of life as the Canton of this day on the southern coast of China. Here throng the unrecorded visions of all the poets. Here are the counterfeits of all

the dead in all their phases. Here float the dreams of men, the unbroken scrolls of life and action and thought complete of all beings, man and beast, that have lived since time began. In the world of matter nothing is lost; in the world of spirit nothing is lost either.

If instead of taking the whole of this imaginary skin off the optic nerve, we simply injure it ever so slightly, the nerve may become alive to some of these spirits; and this premature perception of what is around all of us, but perceived by few, we call seeing ghosts. It may be objected that all space is not vast enough to afford room for such a stupendous panorama. When we begin to talk of limits of space to anything beyond our knowledge and the touch of our inch-tape, we talk like fools. There is no good in allotting space with a two-foot rule. It is all the same whether we divide zero into infinity or infinity into zero. The answer is the same; "I don't know how many times it goes." Take a cubic inch of air outside your window and see the things packed into it. Here interblent we find all together resistance and light and sound and

odour and flavour. We must stop there, for we have got to the end, not of what *is* packed into that cubic inch of air, but to the end of the things in it revealed to our senses. If we had five more senses we should find five more qualities; if we had five thousand senses, five thousand qualities. But even if we had only our own senses in higher form we should see ghosts.

If the third skin were removed from the optic nerve all things we now call opaque would become transparent, owing to the naked nerve being sensitive to the latent light in every body. The whole round world would become a crystal ball, the different degrees of what we now call opacity being indicated merely by a faint chromatic modification. What we now regard as brilliant sunlight would then be dense shadow. Apocalyptic ranges of colour would be disclosed, beginning with what is in our present condition the least faint trace of tint and ascending through a thousand grades to white, white brighter far than the sun our present eyes blink upon. Burnished

brass flaming in our present sun would then be the beginning of the chromatic scale descending in the shadow of yellow, burnished copper of red, burnished tin of black, burnished steel of blue. So intense then would the sensibility of the optic nerve become that the satellites attendant on the planets in the system of the suns, called fixed stars, would blaze brighter than our own moon reflected in the sea. To the eye matter would cease to be matter in its present, gross obstructive sense. It would be no more than a delicate transparent pigment in the wash of a water-colour artist. The gross rotundity of the earth would be, in the field of the human eye, a variegated transparent globe of reduced luminousness and enormous scales and chords of colour. The Milky Way would then be a concave measureless ocean of prismatic light with pendulous opaline spheres.

The figures of dreams and ghosts may be as real as we are pleased to consider ourselves. What arrogance of us to say they are our own creation! They may look upon themselves as superior to us, as we look upon ourselves as

superior to the jelly-fish. No doubt we are to ghosts the baser order, the spirits stained with the woad of earth, low creatures who give much heed to heat and cold, and food and motion. They are the sky-children, the chosen people. They are nothing but circumscribed will wedded to incorporeal reasons of the nobler kind, and with scopes the contemplation of which would split our tenement of clay. They are the arch-angelic hierarchs of man, the ultimate condition of the race, the spirit of this planet distilled by the sun.

THE BEST TWO BOOKS.

IN no list I met of the best hundred books, when that craze took the place of spelling-bees and the fifteen puzzle, do I recollect seeing mention made of my two favourite works. These two books stand completely apart in my esteem, and if I were asked to name the volume that comes third, I should have to make a speech of explanation. The first of them is not in prose or verse, it is not a work of theology or philosophy or science or art or history or fiction or general literature. It is at once the most comprehensive and impartial book I know. This paragraph is assuming the aspect of a riddle. Being in a mild and passionless way a lover of my species, I am a loather of riddles. So I will go

no further on the downward way, but declare the name, title, and style of my book to be Nuttall's *Standard Dictionary*.

I am well aware there is a great deal to be said against Nuttall's *Dictionary* as a dictionary, but I am not speaking of it in that sense. I am treating it as a dear companion, a true friend, a *vade mecum*. Let those who have a liking for discovering spots in the sun glare at the orb until they have a taste for nothing else but spots in the sun. I find Nuttall so close to my affections that I can perceive no defects in him. I cannot bear to hold him at arm's length, for critical examination. I hug him close to me, and feel that while I have him I am almost independent of all other books printed in the English language.

Cast your eyes along your own bookshelves of English authors; every word, liberally speaking, that is in each and every volume on your shelves is in my Nuttall! Here is the juice of the language, from Shakespeare to Huxley, in a concentrated solution. Here is a book that starts by telling you that A is a vowel, and does not

desert you until it informs you that zythum is a beverage, a liquor made from malt and wheat; a fact, I will wager, you never dreamed of before! And between A and zythum, what a boundless store of learning is disclosed! This is the only single-volume book I know of which no man living is or ever can be the master. Charles Lamb would not allow that dictionaries are books at all. In his days they were white-livered charlatans compared with the full-blooded enthusiast, Nuttall.

If such an unkind thing were desirable as to diminish the conceit of a man of average reading and intelligence, there is no book could be used with such paralysing effect upon him as this one. It is almost impossible for any student to realise the infinite capacity for ignorance with which man is gifted until he is brought face to face with such a book as Nuttall. The list of words whose meanings are given occupies 771 very closely printed pages of small type in double column. The letter A takes up from 1 to 52. How many words unfamiliar to the ordinary man are to be found in this fifteenth part of

the dictionary! On the top of every folio there occur four words, one at the head of each column. Barring the right of the candidates in ignorance to guess from the roots how many well-informed people know or would use any of the following words—absciss, acidimeter, acroteleutic, adminicular, adminiculator, adustion, aerie, agrestic, allignment, allision, ambreine, ampulla, ampullaceous, android, antiphonary, antiphony, apanthropy, aponeurosis, appellor, aramaic, aretology, armilla, armillary, asiarch, assentation, asymptote, asymptotical, aurate, averruncator, aversant, axotomous, or axunge? And yet all these are at the heads of columns under A alone! Take, now, one column haphazard perpendicularly, and with the same reservation as before, who would use antimaniac, antimask, antimasonic, antimeter, antimonite, antinephritic, antinomian, antinomy, antipathous, antipedobaptist, antiperistaltic, antiperistasis, or antiphlogistic? The letter A taken along the top of the pages or down one column is not a good letter for the confusion of the conceited; because viewed across the top of the page it is pitifully the prey of

prefixes which lead to large families of words, and viewed down the column (honestly selected at haphazard), it is the bondslave of one prefix. When, however, one starts a theory, it is not fair to pick and choose. I have, of course, eschewed derivatives in coming down the column; across the column I did not do so, as the chance of a prime word being at the bottom of one column and its derivate at the top of the next ought to count two in my favour. I am aware this claim may be disputed; I have disputed it with myself at much too great length to record here, and I have decided in my own favour.

Of course the mere reading of the dictionary in a mechanical way would produce no more effect than the repetition of numerals abstracted from things. There is no greater suggestiveness in saying a million than in saying one. But what an enlargement of the human capacity takes place when a person passes from the idea of one man to the idea of a million men. Take the first word quoted from the head of the column. I had wholly forgotten the meaning of absciss. I cannot even now re-

member that I ever knew the meaning of it, though of course I must, for I was supposed to have learned conic sections once. Why any one should be expected to learn conic sections I cannot guess. As far as I can now recall, they are the study of certain possible systems and schemes of lines in a wholly unnecessary figure. I believe the cone was invented by some one who had conic sections up his sleeve, and devised the miserable spinning of the triangle merely to gratify his lust of cruelty to the young. The only one use to which cones are put, as far as I am aware, is for a weather signal on the sea coast. The only section of a cone put to any pleasant use is a frustum when it appears in the bark of the cork tree; and even this conic section is not of much use to pleasure until it is removed from the bottle. Conic sections are reprehensible in another way. They are, in the matter of difficulty, nothing better than impostors. They are really "childlike and bland," and will, when you have conquered your schoolboy terror of them, be found agreeable after-dinner reading.

But I must return to Nuttall. The systematic study of the book is to be deplored. It is, like the Essays of Elia, not to be read through at a sitting, but to be dipped into curiously when one is in the vein. The charm of Lamb is in the flavour; and one cannot reach the more remote and finer joys of taste if one eats quickly. There is no cohesion, and but little thought in Nuttall. It is as a spur, an incentive, to thought I worship the book, and as a storehouse for elemental lore. You have known a thing all your life, let us say, and have called it by a makeshift name. You feel in your heart and soul there must be a more close-fitting appellation than you employ for it, and you endure a sense of feebleness and dispersion of mind. One day you are idly glancing through your Nuttall, and suddenly the clouds, the nebulous mists of a generalized term, roll away, and out shines, clear and sharply defined, the particular definition of the thing. From childhood I have, for example, known a pile-driver, and called it a pile-driver for years and years. All along something told me pile-

driver was no better than a loose and off-hand way of describing the machine. It partook of the barbarous nature of a hieroglyphic. You drew, as it were, the figure of a post, and of a weight descending upon it. The device was much too pictorial and crude. Moreover, it was, so described, a thing without a history. To call a pile-driver a pile-driver is no more than to describe a barn-door cock onomatopoeically as cock-a-doodle-doo—a thing repellent to a pensive mind. But in looking over Nuttall I accidentally alighted on this: "*Fistuca*, fis'—tu-ka, s. A machine which is raised to a given height by pulleys, and then allowed suddenly to fall on the head of a pile; a monkey (L. a rammer)." Henceforth there is, in my mind, no need of a picture for the machine. So to speak, the abstract has become concrète. I would not, of course, dream of using the word *fistuca*, but it is a great source of internal consolation to me. Besides, I attain with it to other eminences of curiosity, which show me fields of inquiry I never dreamed of before.

I have not met the word monkey in this sense until now. I look out monkey in my book, and find one of the meanings "a pile-driver," and that the word is derived from the Italian "*monna*, contraction for *madonna*." Up to this moment I did not know from what monkey was derived, although I had heard that from monkey man was derived. All this sets one off into a delicious doze of thought and keeps one carefully apart from his work. For "who would fardels bear to groan and sweat under a weary" load of even pens, when he might lie back and close his eyes, and drift off to the Rome of Augustus or the Venice of to-day? Philology as mere philology is colourless, but if one uses the records of verbal changes as glasses to the past and present, what panchromatic hues sweep into the pale field of the dictionary! What myriads of dead men stand up out of their graves, and move once more through scenes of their former activities! What re-impositions of old times on old earth take place! What bravery of arms and beauty of women are renewed; what glowing argosies, long moul-

dered, sparkle once more in the sun! What brazen trumpets blare of conquest, and dust of battle roll along the plain! What plentitude of life, of movement, of man is revealed! A dictionary is to me the key-note in the orchestra where mankind sit tuning their reeds for the overture to the final cataclysm of the world.

My second book would be Whitaker's *Almanack*. Owing to miserable ill-luck I have not been able to get a copy of the almanac for this year. I offered fair round coin of the realm for it before the Jubilee plague of ugliness fell upon the broad pieces of her most gracious Majesty. But, alas! no copy was to be had. I was too late in the race. All the issue had been sold. The last edition of which I have a copy is that for 1886. I have one for each year of the ten preceding, and I cannot tell how crippled and humiliated I feel in being without one for 1887.

This is another of the books that Charles Lamb classes among the no-books. As in the case of Nuttall, there was no Whitaker in his

day, and certainly no almanac at all as good. At first glance this book may seem dry and sapless as the elm ready sawn for conversion into parish coffins. But how can anything be considered dry or dead when two hundred thousand of its own brothers are at this moment dwelling in useful amity among our fellowmen? It in one way contrasts unfavourably with almanacs which can claim a longer life, there are no vaticinations in it. But if the gift of prophecy were possessed by other almanacs, why did they not foretell that they would be in the end known as humbugs, and cut their conceited throats? I freely own I am a bigot in this matter; I have never given any other almanac a fair chance, and, what is worse, I have firmly made up my mind not to give any other one any chance at all. What is the good of being loyal to one's friends if one's loyalty is at the beck of every upstart acquaintance, no matter how great his merits or how long his purse? I place my faith in Whitaker, and am ready to go to the stake (provided it is understood that nothing unpleasant takes place there)

chaunting my belief and glorying in my doom.

If you took away Whitaker's *Almanack* from me I do not know how I should get on. It is a book for diurnal use and permanent reference. One edition of it ought to be printed on bank note paper for the pocket, and another on bronze for friezes for the temple of history. It is worth all the Livys and Tacituses that ever breathed and lied. It is more truthful than the sun, for that luminary is always eight minutes in advance of where it seems to be. It is as impartial and veracious as fossilising mud. It contains infinitely more figures than Madame Tussaud's, and teaches of everything above and under the sun, from stellar influences to sewage.

How is the daily paper to be understood lacking the aid of Whitaker? Who is the honourable member for Berborough, of whom the Chancellor of the Exchequer spoke in such sarcastic terms last night? For what place sits Mr. Snivel, who made that most edifying speech yesterday? How old is the

Earl of Champagne, who has been appointed Governor of Labuan? Where is Labuan? What is the value in English money of £T97,000, and 2,784,000 roubles? What are the chances of a man of forty (yourself) living to be a hundred? and what is the chance of a woman of sixty-four (your mother-in-law) dying next year? How much may one deduct from one's income with a view to income tax before one needs begin to lie? What annuity ought a man of your age be able to get for the five thousand pounds you expect on the death of your mother-in-law? How much will you have to pay to the state if you article your son to a solicitor or give him a little capital and start him in an honest business as a pawnbroker? How old is the judge that charged dead against the prisoner whom the jury acquitted without leaving the box? What railway company spends the most money in coal? legal charges? palm oil? Is there anything now worth a gentleman's while to smuggle on his return from the Continent? What is the tonnage of the ironclad rammed yesterday morning by another ironclad

of the Channel squadron? When may one begin to eat oysters? What was the most remarkable event last year? How much longer is it likely to pay to breed farmers in England?

These are only a few, very few, of the queries Whitaker will answer cheerfully for you. Indeed, you can scarcely frame any questions to which it will not make a reply of some kind or other. It contains, moreover, either direct or indirect reference to every man in the United Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland. If you occupy a prominent official position in any walk in life, you will find yourself herein mentioned by name. If you are a simple and prudent trader, you will have your name and your goods described elaborately among the advertisements. If you come under neither of these heads you are sure to be included, not distinguished perhaps personally, under the statistics of the Insane or Criminal classes.

All the information on the points indicated may be said to lie within the parochial domain of the book. But it has a larger, a universal scope, and takes into view all the civilized and

half civilized nations of all the earth. It contains multitudinous facts and figures about Abyssinia, Afghanistan, Annam, Argentine Republic, Austro-Hungary, Baluchistan, Belgium, Bokhara, Bolivia, Borneo, Brazil, Bulgaria, Eastern Roumelia, Burmah, Corea, Central America, Chili, China, Cochin China, Colombia, Congo State, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hawaiian Islands, Hayti, Italy, Japan, Liberia, Madagascar, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, Oman, Orange Free State, Paraguay, Persia, Peru, Portugal, Roumania, Russia, Sarawak, Servia, Siam, Sokoto, Spain, Sweden and Norway. Switzerland, Tibet, Transvaal, Tripoli, Tunis, Turkey, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Zanzibar !

The list takes away one's breath. The mere recital of it leaves one faint and exhausted. Passing the most elementary knowledge of these nations and countries through the mind is like looking at a varying rainbow while the ears are solicited by a thousand tunes. The names, the mere names, of Mexico and Brazil stop my heart

with amazement. The Aztecs and the Amazon call up such visions of man in decay and nature in naked strength that I pause like one in a gorgeous wood held in fear by its unfamiliarity. What has the Amazon done in the ages of its unlettered history? What did the Aztecs know before they began to revert to birds? Then Morocco and Tripoli, what memories and mysteries of man! And Sokoto—of which little is known but the name; and that man was here before England was dis severed from the mainland of Europe. Turkey, as it even now lies crippled and shorn, embraces within its stupendous arms the tombs of the greatest empire of antiquity. Only to think of China is to grow old beyond the reach of chroniclers. Compared with China, Turkey, India, and Russia, even Greece and Rome are mushroom states, and Germany and France virgin soil.

But when I am in no humour for contemplation and alarms of eld I take up my Whitaker for 1886, and open it at page 285. There begins the most incredible romance

ever written by man, and what increases its incredibility is that it happens to be all true.

At page 285 opens an account of the British Empire. The first article is on India, and as one reads, taking in history and statistics with alternate breaths, the heart grows afraid to beat in the breast lest its motion and sound might dispel the enchantment and bring this "miracle of rare device" down about one's head. The opening statement forbids further progress for a time. When one hears that "the British Empire in India extends over a territory as large as the continent of Europe without Russia," it is necessary to pause and let the capacity of the mind enlarge in order to take in this stupendous fact with its stupendous significances.

Here are 254 millions of people living under the flag of Britain! Here is a vast country of the East whose history goes back for a thousand years from this era, which knew Alexander the Great and was the scene of Tamerlane's exploits, subject to the little island on the western verge of modern Europe. Here,

paraded in the directest and most prosaic fashion, are facts and figures that swell out the fancy almost intolerably. Here is one feudatory state, one dependent province, almost as populous as the whole empire over which Don Pedro II. reigns in South America. Here is a public revenue of eighty millions sterling a year, and Calcutta, including suburbs, with a population close upon a million. Here are no fewer than fifty-three towns and cities of more than fifty thousand people each. Here is a gross number of seven hundred and fourteen thousand towns and villages! Is not this one item incredible? Just three quarters of a million, not of people or even houses, but of "towns and villages!" The population of Madras alone is five-sixths of that of the United Kingdom, that of the North-West Provinces and Oudh considerably more, and that of Bengal nearly twice as much as England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales together. The Native States have many more inhabitants than any country in Europe, except Russia. Bombay equals Spain. The Punjaub exceeds Turkey in Asia. Assam exceeds Turkey in

Europe. The Central Provinces about equal Belgium and Holland together ; British Burmah, Switzerland. Berar exceeds Denmark, and all taken together contain more than the combined populations of the United States of America, Austria, Germany, France, Turkey, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Holland, and Belgium ! All ours absolutely, or in the feudatory leash ; with more Mohammedans than are to be found in the Sultan's dominions, and a larger revenue than is enjoyed by any country on earth except England, France, United States of America, Austria, and Russia !

These are facts and figures enough to set one dreaming for a month. This is not an age for epic poetry. It is exceedingly unlikely any poet in the present age will seek the framework for his great work in the past. The past was all very well in its own day until it was found out. Certitudes in bygone centuries have been shaken. The present time is wildly volcanic. Now the hidden, throbbing, mad, fierce, upheaving fires bulge out the crust of earth under fabrics whilom regarded as indestructible, and split their

walls, and warp their pillars, and choke their domes. It was a good thing for Milton and Dante they lived and wrote long ago, for the iconoclasts of to-day are trying to build a great wall across heaven and tear up the sacred pavement of hell. They tell us the Greek armies were a mob of disorderly and timid cits, and that speculations as to the reported dealings of Dr. Faustus with any folk but respectable druggists are too childish for the nursery or Kaffirs. The golden age is no longer the time that will never come again. The past is a fire that has burnt out, a flame that has vanished. To kneel before what has been is to worship impotent shadows. Up to this man has been wandering in the desert, and until now there have not been even trustworthy rumours of the land of promise. But to us has come a voice prophesying good things. The Canaan of the ages is in the future of time. Taking this age at its own estimate I have long thought the subject for the finest epic lying within possibility in our era is the building of the railway to India. Into a history of

that undertaking would flow all the affluents of the ancient world. The stories of Baalbec and Nineveh that are finished, and of Aleppo and Damascus that survive, would fall into this prodigious tale of peaceful conquest. The line would have for marge Assyria on one hand, Egypt on the other; it would reach from the land of the Buddhist through the land of the Mohammedan to the land of the Christian. It would be a work undertaken in honour of the modern god, Progress, through the graves of the oldest peoples, to link the three great forms of faith. All the action of the epic would take place on earth, and all the actors would be men. There would be no need for evolving the god from the machine, for the machine itself would be the god. It would be the history of man from his birth till this hour. It would be most fitly written in English, for English is the most capacious and virile language yet invented by man.

But a mere mortal, such as I, cannot stay in India always, or even abide for ever by the way. Although I have *Whitaker's Almanack*

before me all the time, I have strayed a little from it. In thinking of the lands through which that heroic line of railway would pass, I have almost forgotten the modest volume at my elbow. Yet fragile as it looks, one volume similar to it will last as long as the Pyramids, will come in time to be as old as the oldest memory is now; that is, if the ruins of England endure as long as those of Egypt, for a copy of it lies built up under Cleopatra's Needle.

I turn over the last page of "British India" in my *Almanack*. We are not yet done with orient lands and seas. The article over-leaf is headed "Other British Possessions in the East." Here, if one wants incitement towards prose or verse, dreaming or doing, commerce or pillage, is matter to his hand. The places one may read of are—Aden, Socotra, Ceylon, Hong-Kong, Labuan, British North Borneo, and Cyprus. Then in my book comes "The Dominion of Canada," with its territory "about as large as Europe"! and a revenue equal to Portugal, which discovered

and once held India. After Canada come "Other American Possessions," including British Guiana, which, except for the sugar of Demerara, is little heard of; it occupies a space of earth as large as all Great Britain. So little do people of inferior education know of this dependency, that once, when a speaker in the House of Commons spoke of the "island of Demerara," there was not a single member present who knew that Demerara was not an island, but part of the mainland of South America. Last in the list comes British Honduras, about as big as Wales.

After America, we have our enormous outlying farm in the southern hemisphere, "British Possessions in Australasia." There the land owned by England is again about the size of Europe! Then follow "British Possessions in the West Indies," small in mileage, great in fertility and richness of produce, and with a population twice that of Eastern Roumelia. The "British Possessions in Africa" are considerably larger than France, with about half as many inhabitants as Denmark. The territories owned in

the Southern Atlantic are Ascension, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, and St. Helena. This prodigious list ends with the European Possessions, namely, Malta, Gibraltar, Heligoland, the Channel Islands, and Isle of Man.

By this time the hand is tired writing down the mere names of the riches belonging to Great Britain. Towards the close of my list from Whitaker my energy drooped, and a feeling of enervating satiety came upon me. I am surfeited with splendours, and, like a tiger filled with flesh, I must sleep. But in that sleep what dreams may come! How the imagination expands and aspires under the stimulus of a page of tabulated figures! How the fancy is excited, provoked, by the spectacle of an endless sea in which every quarter of the globe affords a bower for Britannia when it pleases her aquatic highness to adventure abroad upon the deep, into the farthest realms of the morning, into the regions of the dropping sun. Here, in my best two books, are the words of the most copious language that man ever spoke, and the facts and figures of the greatest realm over

which man ever ruled. *Civis Romanus sum!* I will sleep. I will dream that I am alone with my two books. I will speak in this imperial, this dominant dialect, as I move by sea and land among the peoples who live under the flag flying above me now. Who would encumber himself with finite poetry or romance when he may take with him the uncombined vocabulary, with its infinite possibilities of affinities, and the history of the countries and the peoples that lie beneath this flag, and bear in his heart the astounding and exalting consciousness—*Civis Romanus sum!*

LIES OF FABLE AND ALLEGORY.

SOME little while ago the battered and shattered remains of an old bookcase with the sedimentary deposit of my own books, reached me after a journey of many hundred miles from its former resting place. The front of the bookcase is twisted wirework, which, when I remember it first, was lined with pink silk. Not a vestige, not a shred of the silk remains and the half dozen shelves now depend for preservation in position on a frame as crazy as Her Majesty's ship *Victory*, and certainly older. The bookcase had belonged to my grandfather before Trafalgar, and some of the books I found in it among the sediment were printed before the Great Fire of London. In all there were about a couple or three hundred books, none

of which would be highly valued by a bibliophile. Owing to my being in a very modest way a wanderer on the face of the realm, these books had been out of my possession for nearly twenty years, and dusty and dilapidated as they were when they reached me I took them in my arms as long-lost friends. I had finished the last sentence with the word children, but that would not do for two reasons. These books were not mine as this one I am now writing is, and long-lost children change more than they have changed, or more than friends change. Children grow and outpace us and leave us behind and are not so full of companionable memories as friends. There is hardly time to make friends of our adult children before we are beckoned away. The friends we make and keep when we are young have always twenty years' start of our children in friendship. A man may be friendly with his son of five but a father and son cannot be full friends until the son is twenty years older.

Again, as to the impropriety of speaking of the books as long-lost children I have

another scruple. I am in great doubt as to whether the recovery of a long-lost child is at all desirable. A long-lost child means a young girl or boy of our own who is lost when under ten years of age and recovered years afterwards. I do not know that the recovery of the missing one is a cause of gratitude. Remember it is not at all the child we lost. It is a child alleged or alleging itself to be the child we lost. It is more correctly not a child at all, but a lad or lass whom we knew when young, and whose acquaintance we have to make over again. Our personality has become dim to it, and we have to occupy ourselves seriously in trying to identify the unwieldy bulk of the stranger with our memory of the wanderer. When the boy went from us we mourned for him as dead, and now he comes back to us from the tomb altered all out of memory. He is not wholly our child. There is an interregnum in our reign over him and we do not know what manner of king has held sway in our^s stead, or, if knowing the usurper, we cannot measure the extent or force of his

influence. How much of this young person is really our very own? how much the development of untoward fate? Is the memory of our lost one dearer than the presence of this lad who is half stranger? What we lost and mourned was ours surely; how much of what we have regained belongs to us?

With books no such question arises. They are our very own. They have suffered no increment, but rather loss. What we remember of them and find again in them fills us with joy; what we have forgotten and recall excites a surprise which makes us feel rich. We reproach ourselves with not having loved them sufficiently well, and swear upon them to endow them with warmer affection henceforth. In turning over the books in the old case I lighted upon one which I believe to be the volume that came earliest into my possession. It is Cobbett's *Spelling-Book*, and by the writing on the title page I see it was given to me by my father on the second of February, 1854. It is in a very battered and tattered condition. I find a youthful autograph of my own on the

fly-leaf, the Christian name occupying one line, the surname the second ; on a third line is the name of the town, and on a fourth the number of the street and part of the name of the street, the last being, I blush to say, ill-spelt. Surely there never was a book hated as I hated this one! At that time I had declared my unalterable determination of never learning to read. I possessed, until recently, a copy of Valpy's Latin Grammar of about the same date, and I remember I worshipped the Latin Grammar compared with the Spelling-Book. I knew *rosa* before I could read words of two syllables, and at this moment I do not know much more Latin than I did then. The Spelling Book was published by Anne Cobbett, at 137, Strand, in 1849. It is almost incredible that so short a time ago the atrocious woodcuts could be got in England for love or money. There is no attempt whatever at overlaying in the printing; the cut pages are all what are called "flat pulls." Here and there through the pages of chilling columns of words of one, two, three or more syllables are pencil marks

indicating the limits of a day's lesson. What a ruthless way they had with us children in those days! When I look at those appalling columns of arid words I applaud my childish determination of never learning to read if the art were to be acquired only by traversing those fearful deserts of unintelligible verbiage. Fancy a child of tender years confronted with antitrinitarian, consubstantiality, discontinuation, excommunication, extraordinarily, immateriality, impenetrability, indivisibility, naturalization, plenipotentiary, recapitulation, supererogation, transubstantiation, valetudinarian, and volatilization, not one of which is as difficult to spell as one quarter the words of one syllable, and not one of which could be understood by a child or would be used by a single man out of a thousand in all his life. The country had penal settlements then, why in the name of mercy did they not send children to the settlements and give them a chance to keep their reason and become useful citizens when their time of punishment had expired? I am happy to say I find no pencil marks among

those leviathan words above. I suppose I never got into the deep waters where they "wallowing unwieldy in their gait tempest the ocean."

I wonder was the foundation of a lifelong dislike to Cobbett's writings laid in me at that early time of my existence? Anyway I do not remember the day when I did not dislike everything I read of Cobbett's, and I dislike everything of his I read now. I wonder, also, was it at that early date the seed of my hatred of fable or allegory was sown? To me the fables in the back of that Spelling-Book were always odious, now they are loathsome. With the cold-blooded "morals" attendant upon them they are the worst form of literary torture I know. I am aware that the bulk of them are not original, but Cobbett inserted them in his book, and I give him full credit for evil intention. Yet in later years it was not his taste for fable that repelled me but his intense combativeness. He is never comfortable unless he is mangling some one. It was a pity he ever left the army. He would have been a credit to his corps at close quarters with a clubbed musket. Even in

the Spelling-Book, intended for young children, his "Stepping-Stone to Cobbett's English Grammar" takes the form of a dialogue, in which he, the "Teacher," smashes the unfortunate Scholar and Mr. William. Cobbett sprang from the people and was a Saxon pure and simple, and the Saxon is the element in the English people which has been most undistinguished when unmingled with other blood. The Saxon of fifteen hundred years ago is the yokel of to-day, and he never was more than a yokel intellectually. The enormous intellectual fertility of England is owing to successive invasions, and chiefly to the Norman Conquest. All the great and noble and sweet faces in English history are Norman, or largely Norman. The awful faces of the Gibbon type make periods of English history like a night spectral with evil dreams.

Does any one past the condition of childhood really like fables? Mind, I do not say past the years of childhood. But does any one of fully mature intellect like fables or pleasantly endure allegories? I think not. In the vigour of all lives there must be *lacunæ* of intense indolence,

backwaters of the mind, where one is willing to float effortless and take the things that come as though they were good things rather than work at the oars in pursuit of novelties. At such times it is easier to persuade ourselves we are amused by books that we admired when we lacked experience and discernment than to break new ground and encounter fresh obstacles. I am leaving out of account the dull worthy people who say they like a book because other people say they like it. These good people live in a continual state of self-justification. They are much more serenely secure in what they imagine to be their opinions than those travingling souls that really have opinions of their own. Their life is easy, and in lazy moments one sighs for the repose they enjoy. But do not the people with active minds often adhere to childish likings merely from indolence? A certain question they settled in their own minds when they were ten; it is too much trouble to treat it as an open matter at thirty. Consistency in a politician is invariably a sign of stupidity, because no man (outside fundamental questions

of morals) can with credit to his sense remain stationary in opinion for thirty years where all is change. The very data on which he based an opinion in the year one are vapourized in the year thirty. The foundation of all political theories is first principles of some kind, and the only support a philosophic mind rejects with disdain is a first principle of any kind. Now, the fables we tolerate, nay, admire as children, are in imaginative literature what first principles are in that branch of imaginary philanthropy called politics. It is much easier to say every man has a right to eight shillings a day than to find out what each particular man has a right to, or if man has a right to anything at all. It is much easier to say one does like Fontaine than at thirty years of age to acquire a disgust of him and his fables.

The lying insincerity of fables and their morals always shocks me, and the gross blindness of the fabulist to any view of transactions but that adopted by him to point his precept, fills me with contempt for him as an artist.

In the Spelling-Book I do not feel myself at liberty to select the fables as I choose. I will take only one, the first that comes. It is about the swallow and the sparrow. It is a very bad specimen for my contention, but as I am the challenger I have not the choice of weapons, and I accept the first presented by Cobbett.

A swallow coming back to her old nest in the spring finds it occupied by a sparrow and his brood of young ones. The swallow demands possession on the grounds of having built the nest and brought up three broods in it. The sparrow will not budge. The swallow summons a number of swallows, and they wall up the sparrow and he and his brood die of hunger.

The first notice of bias the reader gets is that the swallow is called she, and the sparrow he. Why? For the dishonest purpose of enlisting sympathy with the swallow. There is no evidence or statement the sparrow was aware when taking possession of the nest that it would be reclaimed by the swallow. How was the sparrow to know that the swallow was not dead and buried by the mole? The nest was

derelict. Again, when the swallow returned the sparrow had young ones, which it would be dangerous to remove from the nest. How was the sparrow to know the swallow was telling the truth, and that the nest was hers? Then, even supposing the sparrow to be all in the wrong, the punishment was out of all proportion to the offence. The sparrow had done no harm beyond intruding. He had not injured the furniture, or burned any of the swallow's gas, or broken into the wine-cellar. Justice would have been vindicated by the expulsion of the intruder and his brood. But what takes place instead? The door is built up, and the sparrow with his innocent young is murdered! Surely if this is a fruitful fable, the moral is immoral. This is the old Mosaic theory of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and a little, or rather a great deal more. It is hideously un-Christian. I believe Cobbett professed Christianity. Why did he put this odious vengeful story in the forefront of his exemplars of righteous doing?

But the worst part of the story is in the Moral. "Thus it always is with the unjust," says the Chorus of the fabulist. He means that the unjust are always nailed up in their houses with their blameless children and starved to death. Now neither Cobbett nor any other sane preacher believes anything of the kind. This is a lie, pure and simple; a lie no doubt told with a good object, but a lie all the same. Cobbett had too much common-sense not to know that it is not always "thus" with the "unjust." As a rule, the unjust go scot free when they stop short of crime. The people who say otherwise are yielding to a feminine, sentimental weakness. Poetic justice no doubt does exist—in poetry. Most men are as unjust as they dare be, and most men get on comfortably from their cradles to their graves. It is only the fools, the men of ungovernable passions and impulses and the blunderers who suffer. Man is at heart a rapacious brute. All his centuries of civilization have not quelled the predatory spirit in him. Any man will become a thief if he only be sufficiently tempted when he is sufficiently

desperate. The crime of the sparrow in appropriating the swallow's nest is intelligible, the crime of the swallow in murdering the sparrow and his brood is intelligible, the crime of lying committed by the moralist is abominable. When the child to whom Cobbett lied grows up, he will know the lie, despise the liar, and have nothing left of the precious fable but a shaken faith in the words of all men, whether they be liars like Cobbett and the other moralists, or truth-tellers like the ordinary everyday folk, who do not pose as teachers and latter-day prophets. It is very improving to reflect on the freedom these teachers give themselves in act when enforcing their theories in writing. In order that Cobbett might exemplify his principles against the credit system, he signed his name across the face of acceptances for seventy thousand pounds!

Cobbett's Grammar was written for sailors and soldiers and such men. I gave the only copy of it I ever had to a sailor who had abandoned living on the sea to live by the sea, who had

eschewed the paint-pot and the stage aboard the merchant service for the palette and stool of the studio. It is years since I have seen the book, but I remember the contemptuous way in which the ex-soldier disposes of prosody. He says to his pupil in effect : You need pay no attention to this branch of grammar, as it deals only with the *noise* made by words. Cobbett's treatment of prosody does not occupy more than one line or one line and a half of print. It is briefer than Dr. Johnson's Syntax :

“The established practice of grammarians requires that I should here treat of the Syntax ; but our language has so little inflexion, or variety of terminations, that its construction neither requires nor admits many rules. Wallis, therefore, has totally neglected it ; and Jonson, whose desire of following the writers upon the learned languages made him think a syntax indispensably necessary, has published such petty observations as were better omitted.

“The verb, as in other languages, agrees with the nominative in number and person ; as *Thou fliest from good ; He runs to death.*

“Our adjectives are invariable.

“Of two substantives the noun possessive is the genitive ; as *His father's glory ; the sun's heat.*

“Verbs transitive require an oblique case; as *He loves me; You fear him.*

“All prepositions require an oblique case: *He gave this to me; He took this from me; He says this of me; He came with me.*”

That is all the merciful Dr. Samuel Johnson has to say about syntax. Oh, Lindley Murray! Oh, memories of youth! Does it seem possible that Johnson could have enjoyed the luxury of speaking in this light and airy and debonair way of English grammar in his day, and that Lindley Murray could have matured his awful Grammar in so few years afterwards? Recollect there were not forty years between the lexicographer and the grammarian. Could not Lindley Murray have left the unfortunate English language alone? Johnson says no one need bother about syntax, and Cobbett says no one need bother about prosody. Thus we have only orthography and etymology to look after, when in comes Murray and spoils all! It is doubtful if the language will ever recover the interference of that Yankee merchant who invented syntax and made the life of dull school boys and girls a path of thorns and agony.

An allegory is a fable for fools of larger growth. I am writing in an off-hand way, and I will not pause to examine the question nicely; but is there any such thing as a successful allegory? I have no experience of one. I seem to hear a loud shout of "*The Pilgrim's Progress*." Well, I never could read the book through, and I have tried at least twenty times. I have put the reading of that book before myself in the most solemn manner. I have told myself over and over again that I ought to read it as an educational exercise. In vain. How any man with imagination can bear the book I do not know. Bunyan had inexhaustible invention, but no imagination. He saw a reason for things, not the things themselves. No creation of the imagination can lack consequence or verisimilitude. On almost every page of the *Progress* there is violation of sequence, outrage against verisimilitude. Christian has a great burden on his back and is in rags. He cannot remove the burden. (Why?) He is put to bed (with the burden on his back), then he is troubled in his mind (the burden is forgotten, and the vision altered completely and

fatally); again we are reminded that he has the burden on his back when he tells Evangelist of it. Why can he not loose the burden on his back? How is it secured so that he cannot remove it? He cannot see a wicket gate across a very wide field, but he sees a shining light (where?), and then he begins to run (burden and all) away from his wife and children (which is immoral and abhorrent to the laws of God and man). For the mere selfish ease of his body he deserts his wife and children, who must be left miserably poor, for is he not in rags? The neighbours come out and mock at him for running across a field. Why? How do they know why he runs, and what neighbours are there to come out and mock at one when one is running across a large field? The Slough of Despond is in this field (for he has not passed through the wicket gate), and he does not seem to know of the Slough, or think of avoiding it. Fancy any man not knowing of such a filthy hole within a field of his home! How is it that Pliable and Obstinate have no burdens on their backs? It is not the will of

the King that the Slough should be dangerous to wayfarers: this surely is blasphemy. The whole thing is grotesquely absurd and impossible to imagine. There is no sobriety in it, no sobriety of keeping in it; and no matter how wild the effort or vision of imagination may be there must always be sobriety of keeping in it or it is delirium not imagination, disease not inspiration. As far as I can see there is no trace of imagination, or even fancy, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. The story never happened at all. It is a horrible attempt to tinkerise the Bible.

One of the things I cannot understand about Macaulay is that he stands by Bunyan's silly book. Macaulay was a man of vast reading and acquirements and of common-sense tastes. He was not a poet, but he was very nearly one, and ought to have responded in sympathy with poets. In politics he belonged to that most melancholy of all sects, the Whigs, and it may be that the spirit of political compromise to which he had familiarised himself in public life had slipped unknown to him into his literary

briefs. Anyway, he himself says that the *Pilgrim's Progress* is the only book which was promoted from the kitchen to the drawing-room. There is no difficulty in accounting for the fact that the book was popular among scullions and cooks, but how it ever gained currency among people of moderate education and taste cannot be explained. It is the most dull and tedious and monstrous book of any note in the English language, and how any man with a gleam of imagination can like it is more than I can understand. If one has been familiar with it when young, one may tolerate it on the score of tenderness—tenderness for memories and laziness in new enterprises; but I never yet knew any one with even fancy who, meeting it for the first time after the dawn of adolescence, could even endure it.

It is like celebrating one's own apotheosis to drop Bunyan and take up Spenser. Here we share the air with an immortal god and not a bilious enthusiast. When I have laid aside the *Spelling-Book* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and opened the *Faerie Queen*, I feel as though the

leaden clouds of the north had rolled away, disclosing the blue of Ægean skies; as though for squalid porridge and buttermilk had been substituted ambrosia and nectar; as though for fallow and stubble had drifted under my feet soft meadow-grass dense with flowers; as though the moist and clayey crags had changed into purple hills, the green-mantled pools to azure lakes, the narrow waters of a stagnant mere to the free imperial waves and tides of the ocean. It is better than escaping out of an East-end slum into the green lanes and roads of Warwickshire.

And yet, melancholy truth! the *Faerie Queen* is most unpopular and most unreadable. It has with justice, I think, been said that of ten thousand people who begin the *Faerie Queen*, not ten read half way through it, and only one arrives at the end. I find by a mark in my copy that I have got a good deal more than half through it, but that I have not reached the last line of this most colossal fragment of a poem. What a mercy the rest of it was drowned in the Irish sea! My *Faerie Queen* occupies

792 pages of five stanzas to the page; that is, between thirty-five and thirty-six thousand verses, two hundred and sixty to seventy thousand words, or equal in length to a couple of ordinary three-volume novels! And still it is *unperfite*! I find that although I have owned the book for twenty years, I have got no further than page 472, so that I have read only three-fifths of the fragment of this stupendous poem.

It is not the length alone that defeats the reader. In all the field of English verse there is no poem of great length that comes upon the mind with more full and easy flow. The stanza after a long while becomes, no doubt, monotonous, but it is the monotony of a vast and freightful river that moves majestically, bearing interminable argosies of infinite beauty and variety and significance. After one hundred pages one might put down the book, wearied by the melodious monotony of the imperial chords. I have never been able to read anything like a hundred, anything like fifty pages at a time. I think I have rarely exceeded as many stanzas. Spenser is the poets' poet, and

the *Faerie Queen* the poets' poem, and yet even the poets cannot read it freely and fully, as one reads Milton or Shakespeare or Shelley or Keats or the readable parts of Coleridge, all of whom are poets' poets also.

The allegory bars the way. One reads on smoothly and joyously about a wood or a nymph, or a knight or a lady, or a castle or a dragon, and is half drunk on the wealthy poet's mead (is not Spenser the wealthiest of English poets?), when suddenly Dan Allegory comes along and assures you that it is not a wood or a nymph, or a knight or lady, or a castle or dragon, but a virtue or a vice posing in property clothes; that in fact things are not what they seem, but visions are about. Cobbett intended his fables for little children, and Bunyan his allegory for the company of the stewpans, but Spenser's story is for the ears of ladies and of knights; why then does he try to spoon-feed them with virtuous sentiment? There is not, as far as I know, a trace of dyspepsia in all the *Faerie Queen*, and yet he has sicklied it over "with the pale cast of thought." In this Vale of Tears

there are quite as many virtuous persons as any reasonable man can desire. Why should our poets—those rare and exquisite manifestations of our possibilities—turn themselves into moralists, who are, bless you, as common as grocers, as plentiful as mediocrity. In fact, nine-tenths of the civilised race of man are moralists. But poets ought not to be theorists. They are not sent to us for the purpose of converting us, but for the purpose of delighting us. They ought to be catholic and pagan. They are among the settled property of joy to which all mankind are heirs. They come in among the flowers and colours of the sky and earth, and the vocal rapture of the birds, and the perfumes of the breeze, and the love of woman and children and friends and kind. They are sent to us for our mere delight. They never grow less or fade away or change. They have nothing to do with dynasties or creeds or codes of manners. They are apart from all bias and strife. The will of Heaven itself is against poets preaching, for no poet has ever written hymns that were not a burden upon his reputation as a singer,

and did not weigh him to the ground, compared with his flight when free and catholic and pagan.

After entertaining the nightmares of dulness born of Cobbett and Bunyan, how one's shoulders swing back, one's chest opens, and one's breath comes with large and ample coolness and joy as one reads—

“The ioyous day gan early to appeare ;
And fayre Aurora from the deawy bed
Of aged Tithone gan herselfe to reare
With rosy cheekes, for shame as blushing red :
Her golden locks, for hast, were loosely shed
About her eares, when Una her did marke
Clymbe to her charet, all with flowers spred,
From heven high to chace the chearelesse darke ;
With mery note her lowd salutes the mountain larke.”

Or again here—

“Then forth he called that his daughter fayre,
The fairest Un', his onely daughter deare,
His onely daughter and his onely hayre ;
Who forth proceeding with sad sober cheare,
As bright as doth the morning starre appeare
Out of the east with flaming lockes bedight,
To tell that dawning day is drawing neare
And to the world does bring long wished light :
So fair and fresh that lady shewd herselfe in sight.”

Is it not a miserable destiny to be obliged to read stanza after stanza redolent of such rich perfumed words about the lady, and then to find that Una is not a mortal or a spirit even—but Truth! An abstraction! A whim of degrading reason! A figment of a moralist's heated and disordered brain. Any Lie of a poet is better than any Truth of a moralist. Why did Spenser stoop to run on the same intellectual plain as the accidental teacher? The teacher would have done admirably for Truth, but all the worthy essayists of England in the "spacious days of Queen Elizabeth," put together, could not have written the stanzas about Una as Spenser saw her. This poaching of poets on the preserves of moralists is one of the most shameful things in the history of art.

There are few poets it is harder to select quotations from than Spenser. The fact is, all the *Faerie Queen* ought to be quoted except the blinding allegory. I find that in years of my movement from the opening of the poem to page 472, the limit I have reached, I have marked a hundred passages at least, some

of them running through pages. In no other poem—except Shelley's *Alastor*—do I notice such grievous, continuous pencil scores. What is one to do? Whither is one to turn? As I handle the book I am lost in a deeper forest of delight than ever knight of Gloriana's trod. Here I find a passage of several stanzas marked. I am much too lazy to copy them, and the spelling is troublesome often. But who can resist this?—

“——And, when she spake,
Sweete wordes, like dropping honny, she did shed,
And twixt the perles and rubins softly brake
A silver sound, that heavenly musicke seemed to make.

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Upon her eyelids many graces sate
Under the shadow of her even browes.”

I have quoted the three lines and a half of the earlier stanza merely that they may act as an overture to the last two lines. Surely there are no two lovelier lines in the language! In the last line the words seem to melt together of their own propinquity.

Here is an alexandrine that haunts me night and day—

“Sweete is the love that comes alone with willingnesse.”

As a rule, I hate writing with the books I am speaking of near me; they fetter one cruelly when they are at hand. There is a tendency to verify one's memory, and read up the context of favourite lines. This is checking to the speed and chilling to the spirits. When I was saying something about the *Spelling-Book* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, I had the copies within arm's length, for I did not know either well enough to trust to memory. Since I got done with them I have placed them in distant safety. But one likes to handle Spenser—to have it nigh. My copy is lying at my left elbow in the blazing sun as I write now. It seems to me I shall never again look into the *Spelling-Book* or the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Fables and allegories are only foolishnesses fit for people of weak intellect and children. Well, when I put down this pen, and before this ink is dry, I shall have resumed my interrupted reading of the *Faerie Queen* at page 473. My intellect is too weak and my heart too childish to resist the seduction of Spenser's verse. So much for my own theory of allegory and my respect for my own theory.

MY COPY OF KEATS.

THE only copy of Keats I ever owned is a modest volume published by Edward Moxon and Co. in the year 1861. By writing on its yellow fly-leaf I find it was given to me four years later, in September 1865. At that time it was clean and bright, opened with strict impartiality when set upon its back, and had not learned to respond with alacrity to hasty searches for favourite passages.

The binding is now racked and feeble from use; and if, as in army regulations, service under warm suns is to be taken for longer service in cooler climes, it may be said that to the exhaustion following overwork have been added the prejudices of premature age.

It is not bound as books were bound once upon a time, when they outlasted the tables and chairs,

even the walls ; ay, the very races and names of their owners. The cover is simple plain blue cloth ; on the back is a little patch of printing in gold, with the words Keats's *Poetical Works* in the centre of a twined gilt ribbon and twisted gilt flowers. The welt at the back is bleached and frayed ; the corners of the cover are battered and turned in. There is a chink between the cover and the arched back ; and the once proud Norman line of that arc is flattened and degraded, retaining no more of its pristine look of sturdy strength than a wheaten straw after the threshing.

In a list of new books preceding the biography of the poet I find the volume I speak of under the head "POETRY—*Pocket Editions* ;" described as "Keats's *Poetical Works*. With a Memoir by R. M. Milnes. Price 3s. 6d. cloth." It was from no desire to look my gift-horse in the mouth I alighted upon the penultimate fact disclosed in the description. When I become owner of any volume my first delight in it is to read the catalogue of new books annexed, if there be any, before breaking my fast upon the

subject-matter of the writer in my hand—as a poor gentleman in a spacious restaurant, who, having ordered luncheon, consisting of bread and cheese, butter, and a half-pint of bitter ale, takes up the bill of fare and the list of wines, and designs for his imagination a feast his purse denies to his lips.

If any owner of a cart of old books in Farringdon Street asked you a shilling for such a copy of Keats as mine, you would smile at him. You would think he had acquired the books merely to satisfy his own taste, and now displayed them to gratify a vanity that was intelligible; you would feel assured no motive towards commerce could underlie ever so deeply such a preposterous demand.

My copy will, I think, last my time. Already it has been in my hands more than half the years of a generation; and I feel that its severest trials are over. In days gone by it made journeys with me by sea and land, and paid long visits to some friends, both when I went myself, and when I did not go. Change of air and scene have had no beneficial effect upon it. Journey after

journey, and visit after visit, the full cobalt of the cloth grew darker and dingier, the boards of the cover became limper and limper, and the stitching at the back more apparent between the sheets, like the bones and sinews growing outward through the flesh of a hand waxing old.

Once, when the book had been on a prolonged excursion away from me, it returned sadly out of sorts. Had it been a dear friend come back from India on sick-leave, after an absence from temperate skies of twenty years, I could not have observed a more disquieting change. The cover was darkened so that the original hue had almost wholly disappeared, save at the edges, that, like the Indian veteran's forehead, were of startling and unwholesome pallor. Its presence in such guise aroused a gnawing solicitude which undermined all peace. I could not endure the symptoms of its speedy decline, the prospect of its dissolution; and to shield its case from harm and my sensibilities from continual assault, I wrapped it with sighs and travail of heart in a gritty cover of substantial brown paper.

For a while, the consciousness that my book

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was safe compensated for the unfamiliarity of its appearance and my constitutional antipathy to contact with brown paper, even a lively image of which makes me cringe.

But as days went on the brown paper entered into my soul and rankled. What ! was my Keats to be clad in that wretched union garb, that livery of poverty acknowledged, that corduroy of the bookshelf ? Intolerable ! Should I, who had, like other men, only my time to live, be denied all friendly sight of the natural seeming of my prime friend ? My Keats would last my time ; and why should I hide my friend in an unparticularised garb, the uniform of the mean or the needy, merely that those who came after me might enjoy a privilege of which senseless timidity sought to rob me ? No ; that should not be. I would cast away the badge of beggary, and, like a man, face the daily decay of my old companion. I tore the paper off, threw it upon the fire, and set my disenthralled Keats in its own proper vesture on the shelf among its comrades and its peers.

There is no man, how poor soever, who has

not some taste which, for his circumstances, must be regarded as expensive ; and in that "sweet unreasonableness" of human nature, not at all limited to "the Celt," men take a kind of foolish pride in their particular extravagances. You know a man that declares he would sooner go without his dinner than a clean shirt ; another who would prefer one good cigar to a pound of cavendish ; one who would rather travel to the City of winter mornings by train without an overcoat than by vulgar tramcar in fur and pilot cloth ; a fourth who would more gladly give his right hand than forget his Greek ; a fifth who pays the hire of a piano and does without the beer which as a Briton is his birthright ; a sixth who starves himself and stints his family for the love of a garden. For my own part, I felt the using of my Keats without protection of any kind to be beyond my means, but I gloried in this extravagance. It seemed rich to be thus hand and glove with the book : to touch it when and where I would, and as much as ever I liked : to feel assured that even with free using and free lending it would outlast my short stay here, as the blossoms

of the roses in a friend's hedge outlast your summer visit. Was it not fine, did it not strike a chord of kingly generosity, to be able to say to a friend, "Here is my copy of Keats. Take it, use it, read it. There is plenty of it for you and me"? I would rather have the lending of my Keats than the bidding to a banquet.

So it fell out that my favourite went more among my friends than ever, and accumulated at a usurious rate all manner of marks and stains, and defacements, and dog-ears, and other unworded comments, as well as verbal comments expressed in pencil and ink. It is true that a rolling stone gathers no moss, but a rolling snowball gathers more snow, and moss and snow are of about equal value. Oliver Wendell Holmes says, if I may trust my memory, that only three things improve with years: violins, wine, and meerschaum pipes. He loves books, and knows books as well as any man now living—almost as well as Charles Lamb did when he was with us; and yet Dr. Holmes does not think books worthy of being included in the list of things that time ripens. Is this ingrati-

tude or carelessness, or does it mean that books dwell apart, and are no more to be classed with mere tangible things than angels, or mathematical points, or the winds of last winter? Is a book to him an ethereal record of a divine trance? an insubstantial painting of a splendid dream? the music of a yesterday fruitful in heavenly melody? the echo of a syren's song haunting a sea shell?

Does not De Quincey tell us that, having lent some books to Coleridge, the poet not only wrote the lender's name in them, but enriched the margins with observations and comments on the texts? Who would not give a tithe of the books he has for one volume so gloriously illuminated? I remember when I was a lad, among lads, a friend of ours picked up second-hand Cary's Dante, in which was written the name of a poet still living, but who is almost unknown. We loved the living poet for his work, and when the buyer told us that the Dante bore not only the poet's name, but numerous marginal notes and hints in his handwriting, we all looked upon the happy possessor with eyes of envious

respect. The precious volume was shown to us, not in groups, for in gatherings there is peril of a profaning laugh, or an unsympathetic sneer. One by one we were handed the book, on still country roads, upon the tranquil heights of hills, where we were alone with the brown heather and the plover, or on some barren cliff above the summer sea. The familiar printed text sank into insignificance beside the blurred pencil lines. Any one might buy a fair uncut copy for a crown piece. The text was common property—" 'twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands." But here before us lay revealed the private workings of a poetic imagination, fired by contact with a master of the craft. To us this volume disclosed one of our heroes, clad in the homely garb of prose, speaking in his own everyday speech, and lifting up his voice in admiration, wonder, awe, to the colossal demi-god, in whose presence we had stood humiliated and afeard.

My Keats has suffered from many pipes, many thumbs, many pencils, many quills, many pockets. Not one stain, one gape, one

blot of these would I forego for a spick and span copy in all the gorgeous pomp of the book-binder's millinery. These blemishes are aureolæ to me. They are nimbi around the brows of the gods and demi-gods, who walk in the triumph of their paternal despot on the clouds metropolitan that embattle the heights of Parnassus.

What a harvest of happy memories is garnered in its leaves ! How well I remember the day it got that faint yellow stain on the page where begins the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. It was a clear, bright, warm, sunshiny afternoon late in the month of May. Three of us took a boat and rowed down a broad blue river, ran the nose of the boat ashore on the gravel beach of a sequestered island and landed. Pulling was warm work, and we all climbed a slope, reached the summit, and cast ourselves down on the long lush cool grass, in the shade of whispering sycamores, and in a stream of air that came fresh with the cheering spices of the hawthorn blossom.

One of our company was the best chamber reader I have ever heard. His voice was

neither very melodious nor very full. Perhaps he was all the better for this because he made no effort at display. As he read, the book vanished from his sight, and he leaned over the poet's shoulder, saw what the poet saw, and in a voice timid with the sense of responsibility, and yet elated with a kind of fearing joy, told of what he saw in words that never hurried, and that, when uttered, always seemed to hang substantially in the air like banners.

He discovered and related the poet's vision rather than simulated passion to suit the scene. I remember well his reading of the passage :

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare ;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve ;
She cannot fade though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love and she be fair !”

He rehearsed the whole of the ode over and over again as we lay on the grass watching the vast chestnuts and oaks bending over the river, as though they had grown weary of the sun, and longed to glide into the broad full stream.

As he read the lines just quoted, he gave us time to hear the murmur, and to breathe the fragrance of those immortal trees. "Nor ever can those trees be bare," in the text has only a semicolon after it. Yet here he paused, while three wavelets broke upon the beach, as if he could not tear himself away from contemplating the deathless verdure, and realising the prodigious edict pronounced upon it. "Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss, though winning near the goal." At the terrible decree he raised his eyes and gazed with heavy-lidded, hopeless commiseration at this being, who, still more unhappy than Tithonus, had to immortality added perpetual youth, with passion for ever strong, and denial for ever final.

"Yet do not grieve." This he uttered as one who pleads forgiveness of a corpse—merely to try to soothe a conscience sensible of an obligation that can never now be discharged. "She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, for ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!" Here the reader, with eyes fixed and rayless, seemed by voice and pose to be sunk, beyond

all power of hope, in an abyss of despair. The barren immutability of the spectacle appeared to weigh upon him more intolerably than the wreck of a people. He spoke the words in a long drawn-out whisper, and, after a pause, dropped his head, and did not resume.

I recollect that when the illusion he wrought up so fully in my mind had passed away in that long pause, and when I remembered that the fancy of the poet was expending itself, not on beings whom he conceived originally as human, but on the figures of a mere vase, I was seized with a fierce desire to get up and seek that vase through all the world until I found it, and then smash it into ten thousand atoms.

When I had written the last sentence, I took up the volume to decide where I should recommence, and I "turned the page, and turned the page." I lived over again the days not forgotten, but laid aside in memory to be borne forth in periods of high festival. I could not bring myself back from the comrades of old, and the marvels of the great magician, to this poor street, this solitude, and this squalid company of my

own thoughts—thoughts so trivial and so mean compared with the imperial visions into which I had been gazing, that I was glad for the weariness which came upon me, and grateful to gray dawn that glimmered against the blind and absolved me from further obligation for that sitting.

On turning over the leaves without reading, I find *Hyperion* opens most readily of all, and seems to have fared worst from deliberate and unintentional comment. Much of the wear and tear and pencil marks are to be set down against myself; for when I take the book with no definite purpose I turn to *Hyperion*, as a blind man to the warmth of the sun. Some qualities of the poem I can feel and appreciate; but always in its presence I am weighed down by the consciousness that my deficiency in some attribute of perception debars me from undreamed-of privileges.

I recall one evening in a pine glen, with one man and *Hyperion*. It would be difficult to match this man or me as readers. I don't think there can be ten worse employing the

English language to-day. I not only do not by any inflection of voice expound what I utter, but I am often incapable of speaking the words before me. I take in a line at a glance, see its import with my own imagination apart from the verbiage, which leaves not a shadow of an impression on my mind. When I come to the next line I grow suddenly alive to the fact that I have to speak off the former one. I am in a hurry to see what line two has to show ; so, instead of giving the poet's words for line one, I give my own description of the vision it has conjured up in my mind. This is bad enough in all conscience ; but the friend of whom I speak now, behaves even worse. His plan of reading is to stop his voice in the middle of line one, and proceed to discuss the merits of line two, which he had read with his eye, but not with his lips, and of which the listener is ignorant, unless he happen to know the poem by rote.

On that evening in the glen I pulled out Keats, and turned, at my friend's request, to *Hyperion*, and began to read aloud. He was more patient than mercy's self ; but occasion-

ally, when I did a most exceptionally bad murder on the text, he would writhe and cry out, and I would go back and correct myself, and start afresh.

He had a big burly frame, and a deep full voice that shouted easily, and some of the comments shouted as I read are indicated by pencil marks in the margin. The writing was not done then, but much later, when he and I had shaken hands, and he had gone sixteen thousand miles away. As he was about to set out on that long journey, he said, "In seven years more I'll drop in and have a pipe with you." It had been seven years since I saw him before. The notes on the margin are only keys to what was said ; for I fear the comment made was more bulky than the text, and the text and comment together would far exceed the limits of such an essay as this. I therefore curtail greatly, and omit much.

I read down the first page without meeting any interruption ; but when I came in page two on

"She would have ta'en
Achilles by the hair and bent his neck,"

he cried out, "Stop! Don't read the line following. It is bathos compared with that line and a half. It is paltry and weak beside what you have read. 'Ta'en Achilles by the hair and bent his neck.' By Jove! can you not see the white muscles start out in his throat, and the look of rage, defeat and agony on the face of the Greek bruiser? But how flat falls the next line: 'Or with a finger stay'd Ixion's wheel.' What's the good of stopping Ixion's wheel? Besides, a crowbar would be much better than a finger. It is a line for children, not for grown men. It exhausts the subject. It is too literal. There is no question left to ask. But the vague 'Ta'en Achilles by the hair and *bent* his neck' is perfect. You can see her knee in the hollow of his back, and her fingers twisted in his hair. But the image of the goddess dabbling in that river of hell after Ixion's wheel is contemptible."

He next stopped me at

"Until at length old Saturn lifted up
His faded eyes, and saw his kingdom gone."

"What an immeasurable vision Keats must

have had of the old bankrupt Titan, when he wrote the second line ! Taken in the context it is simply overwhelming. Keats must have sprung up out of his chair as he saw the gigantic head upraised, and the prodigious grief of the grey-haired god. But Keats was not happy in the matter of full stops. Here again what comes after weakens. We get no additional strength out of

“‘And all the gloom and sorrow of the place
And that fair kneeling Goddess.’

The ‘gloom and sorrow’ and the ‘goddess’ are abominably anticlimacteric.”

“Yes, there must be a golden victory ;
There must be gods thrown down and trumpets
blown
Of triumph calm, and hymns of festival
Upon the gold clouds metropolitan,
Voices of soft proclaim, and silver stir
Of strings in hollow shells ; and there shall be
Beautiful things made new, for the surprise
Of the sky-children ; I will give command :
Thea ! Thea ! Thea ! where is Saturn ? ”

“Read that again !” cried my friend, clinging to the grass and breathing hard. “Again !” he cried, when I had finished the second time. And then, before I could proceed, he sprang to his feet, carrying out the action in the text immediately following :

“This passion lifted him upon his feet,
And made his hands to struggle in the air.”

“Come on, John Milton,” cried my friend, excitedly sparring at the winds,—“come on, and beat that, and we’ll let you put all your adjectives behind your nouns, and your verb last, and your nominative nowhere ! Why man,”—this being addressed to the Puritan poet—“it carried Keats himself off his legs ; that’s more than anything you ever wrote when you were old did for you. There’s the smell of midnight oil off your later spontaneous efforts, John Milton.

“When Milton went loafing about and didn’t mind much what he was writing he could give any of them points”—(I deplore the language) “any of them, ay, Shakespeare him-

self points in a poem. In a poem, sir " (this to me), " Milton could give Shakespeare a hundred and one out of a hundred and lick the Bard easily. How the man who was such a fool as to write Shakespeare's poems had the good sense to write Shakespeare's plays I can never understand. The most un-Shakesperian poems in the language are Shakespeare's. I never read Cowley, but it seems to me Cowley ought to have written Shakespeare's poems, and then his obscurity would have been complete. If Milton only didn't take the trouble to be great he would have been greater. As far as I know there are no English poets who improved when they ceased to be amateurs and became professional poets, except Wordsworth and Tennyson. Shelley and Keats were never regular race-horses. They were colts that bolted in their first race and ran until they dropped. It was a good job Shakespeare gave up writing rhymes and posing as a poet. It was not until he despaired of becoming one and took to the drama that he began to feel his feet and show his pace. If he had suspected he was a great poet he would have adopted the airs of

the profession and been ruined. In his time no one thought of calling a play a poem—that was what saved the greatest of all our poets to us. The only two things Shakespeare didn't know is that a play may be a poem and that his plays are the finest poems finite man as he is now constructed can endure. It is all nonsense to say man shall never look on the like of Shakespeare again. It is not the poet superior to Shakespeare man now lacks, but the man to apprehend him."

I looked around uneasily, and found, to my great satisfaction, that there was no stranger in view. My friend occupied a position of responsibility and trust, and it would be most injurious if a rumour got abroad that not only did he read and admire verse, but that he held converse with the shades of departed poets as well. In old days men who spoke to the vacant air were convicted of necromancy and burned; in our times men offending in this manner are suspected of poetry and ostracized.

As soon as my friend was somewhat calmed, and had cast himself down again and lit a

pipe, I resumed my reading. He allowed me to proceed without interruption until I came to.

• “His palace bright,
Bastion'd with pyramids of glowing gold,
And touch'd with shade of bronzed obelisks,
Glared a blood-red through all its thousand courts,
Arches, and domes, and fiery galleries ;
And all its curtains of Aurorian clouds
Flushed angrily : while sometimes eagles' wings,
Unseen before by Gods or wondering men,
Darken'd the place ; and neighing steeds were heard,
Not heard before by Gods or wondering men.”

“Prodigious !” he shouted. “Go over that again. Keep the syllables wide apart. It is a good rule of water-colour sketching not to be too nice about joining the edges of the tints ; this lets the light in. Keep the syllables as far apart as ever you can, and let the silentness in between to clear up the music. How the gods and the wondering men must have wondered ! Do you know, I am sure Keats often frightened, terrified himself with his own visions. You remember he says somewhere he doesn't think any one could dare to read some one or another aloud at

midnight. I believe that often in the midnight he sat and cowered before the gigantic sights and sounds that reigned despotically over his fancy."

"O dreams of day and night!
O monstrous forms! O effigies of pain!
O spectres busy in a cold, cold gloom!
O lank-ear'd Phantoms of black-weeded pools!
Why do I know ye? why have I seen ye? why
Is my eternal essence thus distraught
To see and to behold these horrors new?
Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall?
Am I to leave this haven of my rest,
This cradle of my glory, this soft clime,
This calm luxuriance of blissful light,
These crystalline pavilions, and pure fanes,
Of all my lucent empire? It is left
Deserted, void, nor any haunt of mine.
The blaze, the splendour, and the symmetry
I cannot see—but darkness, death and darkness.
Even here, into my centre of repose,
The shady visions come to domineer,
Insult, and blind and stifle up my pomp—
Fall!—No, by Tellus and her briny robes!
Over the fiery frontier of my realms
I will advance a terrible right arm
Shall scare that infant thunderer, rebel Jove,
And bid old Saturn take his throne again."

“What more magnificent prelude ever was uttered to oath than the portion of this speech preceding ‘No, by Tellus’! What more overpowering, leading up to an overwhelming threat, than the whole passage going before ‘Over the fiery frontier of my realms I will advance a terrible right arm’! What menacing deliberativeness there is in this whole speech, and what utter completeness of ruin to come is indicated by those words, ‘I will advance a terrible right arm’! You feel no sooner shall that arm move than ‘rebel Jove’s’ reign will be at an end, and that chaos will be left for Saturn to rule and fashion once more into order. Shut up the poem now. That’s plenty of *Hyperion*, and the other books of it are inferior. There is more labour and more likeness to *Paradise Lost*.” And so my friend, who is 16,000 miles away, and I turned from the Titanic theme, and spoke of the local board of guardians, or some young girl whose beauty was making rich misery in the hearts of young men in those old days.

There is no other long poem in the volume

bearing any marks which indicate such close connection with any individual reader as in the case of *Hyperion*. *Endymion* boasts only one mark, and that expressing admiration of the relief afforded from monotony of the heroic couplets by the introduction in the opening of the double rhyming verses:

“Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing—”

The friend to whom this mark is due never handled the volume, never even saw it; but once upon a time when he, another man, and I had got together, and were talking of the “gallipot poet,” the first friend said he always regarded this couplet as most happily placed where it appears. So when I reached home I marked my copy at the lines. Now, when I open the volume and find that mark, it is as good to me as, better than, a photograph of my friend; for I not only see his face and figure, but once more he places his index-finger on the table, as we three sit smoking, and whispers out the six opening lines, ending

with the two I have quoted. Suppose I too should some day go 16,000 miles away from London, and carry this volume with me, shall I not be able to open it when I please, and recall what I then saw and heard, what I now see and hear, as distinctly as though no long interval of ocean or of months lay between to-night and that hour?

Can I ever forget my burly tenor friend, who sang and composed songs, and dinted the line in *The Eve of St. Agnes*,

“The silver, snarling trumpets ’gan to chide,”

and declared a hundred times in my unwearied ears that no more happy epithet than snarling could be found for trumpets? He over and over again assured me, and over and over again I loved to listen to his fancy running riot on the line, how he heard and saw brazen and silver and golden griffins quarrelling in the roof and around his ears as the trumpets blared through the echoing halls and corridors. He, too, marked

“The music, yearning like a God in pain.”

“Keats,” he would say, “seems to have got not only at the spirit of the music, but at the very flesh and blood of it. He has done one thing for me,” my friend continued. “Before I read these lines, and others of the same kind, in Keats, my favourite tunes always represented an emotion of my own mind. Now they stand for individual characters in scenes, like descriptions of people in a book. When I hear music now I am with the Falstaffs or the Romolas, with Quasimodo or Julius Cæsar.”

I have been regarding the indentures in the volume chronologically. The next marks of importance in the order of the years occur, one in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the other in the *Ode to a Nightingale*. These marks, more than any others, I regard with grateful memory. They are not the work of the hand of him for whom I value them. I have good reason to look on him as a valid friend. For months between him and me there had existed an acquaintance necessarily somewhat close, but wholly uninformed with friendship. We spoke to one another as Mr. So-and-so. Neither of

us suspected that the other had any toleration of poets or poetry. Our commerce had been in mere prose. One day, in mid-winter, when a chilling fog hung over London, I chanced to go into a room where he was writing alone. After a formal greeting, I complained of the cold. He dropped his pen and looked up. "Yes," he said, "very cold and dark as night. Do you know the coldest night that ever was?" I answered that I did not. "It was St. Agnes's Eve, when

"The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold."

And so we fell to talking about Keats, and talked and talked for hours; and before the first hour of our talk had passed we had ceased "Mistering" one another for ever. The fire of his enthusiasm rose higher and higher as the minutes swept by. He knew one poet personally, for whose verse I had profound respect, and this poet, he told me, worshipped Keats. Often in our talks I laid plots for bringing him back to the simple sentence, "You should hear M. talk about Keats." The

notion that any one who knew M. could think M. would talk to me about Keats intoxicated me. "He would not let me listen to him?" I said half fearfully. "M. would talk to any one about Keats—to even a lawyer." How I wished at that moment I was a Lord Chancellor who might stand in M.'s path. I have, in a way, been near to that poet since. I might almost have said to him,

"So near, too! You could hear my sigh,
Or see my case with half an eye;
But must not—there are reasons why."

So this friend I speak of now and I came to be great friends indeed. We often met and held carnivals of verse, carnivals among the starry lamps of poetry. He had a subtle instinct that saw the jewel, however it might be set. He owned himself the faculty of the poet, which gave him ripe knowledge of all matters technical in the setting.

"Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain."

He would quote these two lines and cry, "Was

ever death so pangless as that spoken of here? 'To *cease* upon the midnight!' Here is no struggle, no regret, no fear. This death is softer and lighter and smoother than the falling of the shadow of night upon a desert of noiseless sand."

For a long time the name of one man had been almost daily in my ears. I had been hearing much through the friend to whom I have last referred about his intuitive eye and critical acumen. That friend had informed me of the influence which his opinion carried; and of how this man held Keats high above poets to whom we have statues of brass, whose names we give to our streets. My curiosity was excited, and, while my desire to meet this man was largely mingled with timidity, I often felt a jealous pang at thinking that many of the people with whom I was acquainted knew him. At length I became distantly connected with an undertaking in which he was prominently concerned. Through the instrumentality of one friendly to us both, we met. It was a sacred night for me, and I sat and listened, enchanted. After some hours the talk wheeled

round upon sonnets. "Sonnets!" he cried, starting up; "who can repeat the lines about Cortez in Keats? You all know it." Some one began to read or repeat the sonnet. Until coming upon the words, "or like stout Cortez." "That's it, that's it! Now go on."

"Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

"'And all his men looked at each other with a *wild* surmise,'" he repeated, "'*silent* upon a peak in Darien.' The most enduring group ever designed. They are standing there to this day. They will stand there for ever and for ever; they are immutable. When an artist carves them you may know that Buonarotti is risen from the dead and is once more abroad."

That portion of a book which is called a preface and put first, is always the last written. It may be human, but it is not logical, that when a man starts he does not know what he has to say first, until he finds out by an elaborate guess

of several hundred pages what he wants to say last. It would be unbecoming of me in a collection of ignorant essays to affect to know less than a person of average intelligence ; but I am quite sincere when I say I am not aware who the author is of the great aphorism that "After all, there is a great deal of human nature in man." There is, I would venture to say, more human nature than logic in man. My copy of Keats is no exception to the general rule of books. The preface ought to precede immediately the colophon. Yet it is in the forefront of the volume, before even the very title page itself. It forms no integral part of the volume, and is unknown to the printer or publisher. It was given to me by a thoughtful and kind-hearted friend at whose side I worked for a considerable while. One time, years ago, he took a holiday and vanished, going from among us I knew not whither. On coming back he presented each of his associates with something out of his store of spoil. That which now forms the preface to my copy he gave me. It consists of twelve leaves ; twelve myrtle leaves on a spray.

When he was in Rome he bore me in mind and plucked this sprig at the grave of the poet. It is consoling to remember Keats is buried so far away from where he was born, when we cannot forget that the abominable infamy of publishing his love-letters was committed in his own country—here in England. His spirit was lent to earth only for a little while, and he gave all of it to us. But we were not satisfied. We must have his heart's blood and his heart too. The gentlemen who attacked his poetry when he was alive really knew no better, and tried, perhaps, to be as honest as would suit their private ends. But the publication of the dead man's love-letters, fifty years after he had passed away, cannot be attributed even to ignorance. If any money was made out of the book it would be a graceful act to give it to some church where the burial ground is scant, and the parish is in need of a Potter's Field.

When I take down my copy of Keats, and look through it and beyond it, I feel that while it is left to me I cannot be wholly shorn of my friends. It is the only album of photographs I

possess. The faces I see in it are not for any eye but mine. It is my private portrait gallery, in which hang the portraits of my dearest friends. The marks and blots are intelligible to no eye but mine ; they are the cherished hieroglyphics of the heart. I close the book ; I lock up the hieroglyphics ; I feel certain the book will last my time. Should it survive me and pass into new hands—into the hands of some boy now unborn, who may pluck out of it posies of love-phrases for his fresh-cheeked sweetheart—he will know nothing of the import these marginal notes bore to one who has gone before him ; unless, indeed, out of some cemetery of ephemeral literature he digs up this key—this Rosetta stone.

DECAY OF THE SUBLIME.

THE sublime is dying. It has been pining a long time. At last dissolution has set in. Nothing can save it but another incursion of Goths and Huns; and as there are no Goths and Huns handy just now, the sublime must die out, and die out soon. You can know what a man is by the company he keeps. You can judge a people by the ideas they retain more than by the ideas they acquire. The philology of a tongue, from its cradle to its grave, is the social history of the people who spoke it. To-day you may mark the progress of civilisation by the decay of the sublime. Glance at a few of the nations of earth as they stand. Italy and Spain still hold with the sublime in literature and art, although, being exhausted stocks, they cannot produce it any longer. France is

cynical, smart, artistic, but never was and never can be sublime, so long as vanity rules her; and yet, by the irony of selection, sublime is one of her favourite words. Central Europe has had her sublime phases, but cannot be even thought of now in connection with the quality; and Russia and Turkey are barbarous still. If we come to the active pair of nationalities in the progress of current civilisation, the United States and England, we find the sublime in very poor case.

Young England across the water is the most progressive nation of our age, because it is the most practical. If ever there was a man who put his foot on the neck of the sublime, that man is Uncle Sam. His contribution to the arts is almost nothing. His outrages against established artistic canons have been innumerable. He owns a new land without traditions. He laughs at all traditions. He has never raised a saint or a mummy or a religion (Mormonism he stole from the East), a crusader, a tyrant, a painter, a sculptor, a musician, a dramatist, an inquisition, a star chamber, a

council of ten. All his efforts have been in a strictly practical direction, and most of his efforts have been crowned with success. He has devoted his leisure time, the hours not spent in cutting down forests or drugging Indians with whisky, to laughing at the foolish old notions which the foolish old countries cherish. He had a wonderfully fertile estate of two thousand million acres, about only one fourth of which is even to this day under direct human management. In getting these five hundred million acres of land under him he had met all kinds of ground—valley, forest, mountain, plain. But in none of these did he find anything but axes and whisky of the least use. No mountain had been sanctified to him by first earthly contact with the two Tables of the Law. No plain had been rendered sacred as that upon which the miraculous manna fell to feed the chosen people. No inland sea had been the scene of a miraculous draught of fishes. All the land acquired and cultivated by Uncle Sam came to him by the right of whisky and the axe. The mountain was nothing more than so

much land placed at a certain angle that made it of little use for tillage. The plains, the rivers, and inland seas had a simply commercial value in his eyes. He had no experience of a miracle of any kind, and he did not see why he should bow down and respect a mountain, that, to him, was no more than so many thousand acres on an incline unfavourable to cultivation. Such a condition of the ground was a bore, and he would have cut down the mountain as he had cut down the Indian and the forest, if he had known how to accomplish the feat. He saw nothing mystic in the waters or the moon. Were the rivers and lakes wholesome to drink and useful for carriage, and well stocked with fish? These were the questions he asked about the waters. Would there be moonlight enough for riding and working? was the only question he asked about that "orbèd maiden with white fire laden whom mortals call the moon." His notions, his plains, his rivers, his lakes, were all "big," but he never thought of calling them sublime. On his own farm he failed to find any present trace of the supernatural;

and he discovered no trace of the supernatural in tradition, for there was no tradition once the red man had been washed into his grave with whisky. Hence Uncle Sam began treating the supernatural with familiarity, and matters built on the supernatural with levity. Now without the supernatural the sublime cannot exist any length of time, if at all.

It may be urged it is unreasonable to hold that the Americans have done away with the sublime, since in the history of all nations the earlier centuries were, as in America, devoted to material affairs. There is one fact bearing on this which should not be left out of count, namely, that America did not start from barbarism, or was not raised on a site where barbarism had overrun a high state of civilisation. The barbarous hordes of the north effaced the civilisation of old Rome, and raised upon its ashes a new people, the Italians, who in time led the way in art, as the old Romans had before them. The Renaissance was a second crop raised off the same ground by new men. The arts Rome had borrowed from

Greece had been trampled down by Goths, who, when they found themselves in the land of milk and honey, sat down to enjoy the milk and honey, until suddenly the germs of old art struck root, and once more all eyes turned to Italy for principles of beauty. But America started with the civilisation of a highly civilised age. She did not rear her own civilisation on her own soil. She did not borrow her arts from any one country. She simply peopled her virgin plains with the sons of all the earth, who brought with them the culture of their respective nationalities. She has not followed the ordinary course of nations, from conflict to power, from power to prosperity, from prosperity to the arts, luxury, and decay. She started with prosperity, and the first use she made of her prosperity was, not to cultivate the fine arts in her own people, but to laugh at them in others. In the individual man the sense of humour grows with years. In nations the sense of humour develops with centuries. The literature of nations begins with battle-songs and hymns, and ends with burlesques and blasphemies.

Now although America has begun with burlesques and blasphemies, no one can for a moment imagine that America is not going to create a noble literature of her own. She is destined not only to found and build up a noble literature, but one which will be unique. When she has time, when she has let most of those idle one thousand five hundred million acres, she will begin writing her books. By that time she will have running in her veins choice blood from every race on earth, and it is a matter of certainty she will give the world many delights now undreamed of. No other nation on earth will have, or ever has had, such an opportunity of devoting attention to man in his purely domestic and social relations. The United States of to-day has, for practical purposes, no foreign policy. She has no foreign rivals, she is not likely to have foreign wars, while in her own country she has large bodies of men from every people on the world. She owns the largest assorted lot of mankind on the globe, and as years go by we may safely conclude she will add to the variety and number

of her sons. In all this appears no hope for the sublime. There is no instance in literature of a nation going back from laughter to heroics. The two may exist side by side. But that is not the case in America. Up to this hour only one class of transatlantic writers has challenged the attention of Europe, and that class is humorous and profane. Emerson, Bryant, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Lowell, Holmes, and Irving are merely Europeans born in America. But Ward, Harte, Twain, and Breitmann are original and American.

America is undoubtedly the literary promise-land of the future. It has done nothing up to this. Its condition has forbidden it to achieve anything, but great triumphs may be anticipated from it. Crossing the Atlantic, what do we find in the other great branch of the English-speaking race? Religious publications head the list by a long way. They have nothing to do with this subject save in so far as they are in the line of the sublime. All forms of the Christian and Jewish creeds are sublime. Looking at the other walks of literature, we find the death sen-

tence of the sublime written everywhere. With the exception of Mr. Browning, here or there we have no poet or dramatist who attempts it. We have elegant trifles and beautiful form in many volumes of second-rate contemporary verse. There never was a time when the science of poetry was understood until now. Our critics can tell you with mathematical certainty the number of poems as distinguished from pieces of verse every well-known man has written. But we are not producing any great poetry, and none of the sublime kind. This is the age of elegant poetic incentive, of exquisite culture, but it is too dainty. We do not rise much above a poem to a shoe, or an ode to a ringlet, perfumed with one of Mr. Rimmel's best admired distillations. We have a few poets who are continually trying to find out who or what the deuce they are, and what they meant by being born, and so on ; but then these men are for the eclectic, and not the herd of sensible people. We have two men who have done noble work, Browning and Tennyson ; but, speaking broadly, we find the sublime nowhere.

It is true you cannot force genius as you force asparagus; and these remarks are not intended to indict the age with having no poetic faculty or aspiration. Abundance of poetry of a new and beautiful kind does exist, but it is not of the lofty kind born to the men of old.

Turning eyes away from literature, take a few more of the arts. Before we go farther, let us admit that one art at least never reached sublimer recorded heights than to-day. The music of the generation just past is, I believe, in the front rank of the art. It is an art now in the throes of an enormous transformation. Not using the phrase in its slangy meaning, the music of the future is sure to touch splendours never dreamed of by that Raphael of the lyre, Mozart. The only art-Titans now wrestling are the musicians; not those paltry souls that pad the poor words of inane burlesques, but the great spirits that sit apart, and have audiences of the angels. These men, out of their own mouths, assure us that they catch the far-off murmurs of such imperial tones as never filled the ear of man yet. They cannot gather up the broken chords they hear.

They admit they have heard no more than a few bars of the great masters who are close upon us ; but, they say, if they only reproduce the effect these preluding passages have upon them, " Such harmonious madness from their lips would flow, the world should listen then as they are listening now."

Go to the Royal Academy and look round you. How pretty ! How nice ! How pathetic ! But would you like to lend your arm to Michael Angelo, and go round those walls with him ? He would prefer the rack, the gridiron of St. Laurence. It is true there is no necessity for the sublime ; but those men who have been in the awful presence of such dreams as *Night* and *Morning*, by that sculptor, must be pardoned if they prefer it to the art you find in Burlington House. One of our great English poets said, speaking of the trivial nature of conversation at the beginning of this century, that if Lord Bacon were alive now, and made a remark in an ordinary assembly, conversation would stop. If casts of *Night* and *Morning* were placed at the head of the

staircase of Burlington House, no one with appreciation of art would enter the rooms; the strong would linger for ever round those stupendous groups, and the feeble would be frightened away. Of course, the vast crowd of art-patrons would pass the group with only a casual glance, and a protest against having plaster casts occupying ground which ought to be allotted to original work.

Read any speech Burke or Grattan ever spoke, and then your *Times* and the debate last night. How plain it becomes that from no art has the sublime so completely vanished as the orator's. Take those two speakers above, and run your eye over Cicero and Demosthenes, the four are of the one school, in the great style. Theirs is the large and universal eloquence. It is as fresh and beautiful, as pathetic, as sublime now as when uttered, although the occasions and circumstances are no longer of interest to man. The statistician and the poltroon and the verbatim reporter have killed the orator. If any man were to rise in the House and make a speech in the manner of the

ancients, the honourable members would hurry in from all sides to laugh. A few sessions ago a member rose in his place, and delivered an oration on a subject not popular with the House, but in a manner which echoed the grand old style. At once every seat for which there was a member present at the time was occupied; and the next morning the daily papers had articles which, while disposing of the speaker's cause in a few lines, devoted columns to the manner in which he had pleaded it.

To discover what has led to the decay of the sublime is not difficult, and even in an ignorant essay like this, it may be briefly indicated. Roughly speaking, it is attributable to the accumulation of certainties. Any handbook that cribs from Longinus or Burke will tell you the vague is essential to the sublime. To attain it there must be something half understood—not fully known, only partly revealed. To attain it detail must be lost, and only a totality presented to the mind. For instance, if a great lover of Roman history were suddenly to find himself on the top of the

Coliseum, the most sublime result to be obtained from the situation would be produced by repeating to himself the simple words, "This is Rome." By these words the totality of the city's grandeur, influence, power, and enterprises would be vaguely presented to a scholar's mind dim in the glow of a multitude of half-revealing side-lights. If a companion whispered in the scholar's ears, "This place would at one time seat a hundred thousand people," then the particular is reached, and the sublime vanishes like sunshine against a cloud. Most of North America has been explored. Africa and Australia have been traversed. The source of the Nile has been found. We can read the hieroglyphics. We know the elements now flaming in the sun. Many of the phenomena in all branches of physiology which were mysteries to our fathers are familiar common-places of knowledge now. We have learned to foretell the weather. We travel a thousand miles for the hundred travelled by our fathers. We have daily newspapers to discuss all matters, clear away mysteries. We have opened the

grave for the sublime with the plough of progress. Though the words stick in my throat, I must, I daresay, cry, "God speed the plough!"

A BORROWED POET.

TWENTY years ago I borrowed, and read for the first time, the poems of James Clarence Mangan. I then lived in a city containing not one-third as many people as yearly swell the population of London. The friend of whom I borrowed the volume in 1866 is still living in his old home, in the house from which I carried away the book then. I saw him last winter and he is almost as little aged as the hills he has fronted all that time. I have had in those years as many homes as an Arab nomad. He still stays in the old place, and in the gray twilight of dark summer mornings wakes to hear as of yore the twitter of sparrows and the cawing of rooks from the other side of the river, and the hoarse hooting of the steamboat hard by.

The volume of Mangan now by me I borrowed of another old friend, who passes most of his day within sight of that familiar river not quite a hundred yards from the house of the lender of twenty years back. In the meantime I have seen no other copy of Mangan.

This latest fact is not much to be wondered at, for I am not enterprising in the matter of books—rarely buy and rarely borrow, and have never been in the reading room of the British Museum in my life. The book may be common to those who know much about books; but I have seen only the two copies I speak of, and these are of the same edition and of American origin. I believe a selection from the poems was issued a few years ago in Dublin, but a copy has not drifted my way. The title-page of the volume before me is missing, but in a list of publications at the back I find “*The Poems of James Clarence Mangan. Containing German Anthology, Irish Anthology, Apocrypha, and Miscellaneous Poems. With a Biographical and Critical Introduction, by John Mitchel. 1 vol. 12mo. Printed on tinted and calendered paper. Nearly 500 pages. \$1.*”

Beyond all doubt this is the book, and it was published by Mr. P. M. Haverty, of New York.

As far as I know, this is the only edition of Mangan which pretends to be even comprehensive. It does not lay claim to completeness. At the time the late John Mitchel wrote his introduction he was aware of but one other edition of Mangan's poems—the German Anthology, published in Dublin many years ago. I am nearly sure that since the appearance of Mitchel's edition there have been no verses of Mangan's published in book form on this side of the Atlantic, except the selections I have already mentioned, and I do not think any edition whatever has been published in this country.

During the twenty years which have elapsed since first I made the acquaintance of the poems of James Clarence Mangan, I have read much verse and many criticisms of verse, and yet I don't remember to have seen one line about Mangan in any publication issued in England. I believe two magazine articles have appeared, but I never saw them. Almost during these

years, or within a period which does not extend back far beyond them, criticism of verse has ceased to be a matter of personal opinion, and has been elevated or degraded, as you will, into an exact science. The opinions of old reviewers—the Jeffreys and Broughams—are now looked on as curiosities of literature. There is as wide a gulf between the mode of treating poetry now and eighty years ago as there is between the mode of travelling, or the guess-work that makes up the physician's art; and if in a gathering of literary experts any one were now to apply to a new bard the dogmas of criticism quoted for or against Byron, Shelley, Keats, and the Lakers in their time, a silence the reverse of respectful would certainly follow.

This is not the age of great poetry, but it is the age of "poetical poetry," to quote the phrase of one of the finest critics using the English language—one who has, unfortunately for the culture of that tongue and those who use it, written lamentably little. The great danger by which we stand menaced at present is, that our perceptions may become too exquisite and our poetry

too intellectual. This, anyway, is true of poetry which may at all claim to be an expression of thought. There are in our time supreme formists in small things, carvers of cameos and walnut shells, and musical conjurors who make sweet melodies with richly vowelled syllables. But unfortunately the tendency of the poetic men of to-day is towards intellectuality, and this is a humiliating decay. In the times of Queen Elizabeth, when all the poets were Shakespeares, they cared nothing for their intellects. The intellectual side of a poet's mind is an impertinence in his art.

I do not presume to say what place exactly James Clarence Mangan ought to occupy on the greater roll of verse-writers, and I am not sure that he is, in the finest sense of the phrase, a "poetical poet;" but he is, at all events, the most poetical poet Ireland has produced, when we take into account the volume and quality of his song. I shall purposely avoid any reference to him as a translator, except in acting on John Mitchel's opinion, and treating one of his "translations" from the Arabic as an original

poem ; for during his lifetime he confessed that he had passed off original poems of his own as translations ; and Mitchel assures us that Mangan did not know Arabic. As this essay does not profess to be orderly or dignified, or anything more than rambling gossip, put into writing for no other reason than to introduce to the reader a few pieces of verse he may not have met before, I cannot do better than insert here the lines of which I am now speaking :

THE TIME OF THE BARMECIDES.

I.

“My eyes are filmed, my beard is grey,
I am bowed with the weight of years ;
I would I were stretched in my bed of clay
With my long-lost youth’s compeers !
For back to the past, though the thought brings
 woe,
My memory ever glides—
To the old, old time, long, long ago,
The time of the Barmecides !
To the old, old time, long, long ago,
The time of the Barmecides.

II.

“Then youth was mine, and a fierce wild will,
And an iron arm in war,
And a fleet foot high upon Ishkar’s hill,
When the watch-lights glimmered afar,
And a barb as fiery as any I know
That Khoord or Beddaween rides,
Ere my friends lay low—long, long ago,
In the time of the Barmecides;
Ere my friends lay low—long, long ago,
In the time of the Barmecides.

III.

“One golden goblet illumed my board,
One silver dish was there;
At hand my tried Karamanian sword
Lay always bright and bare;
For those were the days when the angry blow
Supplanted the word that chides—
When hearts could glow—long, long ago,
In the time of the Barmecides;
When hearts could glow—long, long ago,
In the time of the Barmecides.

IV.

“Through city and desert my mates and I
Were free to rove and roam,

Our diapered canopy the deep of the sky,
Or the roof of the palace dome.
Oh, ours was the vivid life to and fro,
Which only sloth derides :
Men spent Life so—long, long ago,
In the time of the Barmecides ;
Men spent Life so—long, long ago,
In the time of the Barmecides.

V.

“I see rich Bagdad once again,
With its turrets of Moorish mould,
And the Kalif’s twice five hundred men
Whose binishes flamed with gold.
I call up many a gorgeous show
Which the Pall of Oblivion hides—
All passed like snow, long, long ago,
With the time of the Barmecides ;
All passed like snow, long, long ago,
With the time of the Barmecides.

VI.

“But mine eye is dim, and my beard is grey,
And I bend with the weight of years—
May I soon go down to the House of Clay,
Where slumber my Youth’s compeers !

For with them and the Past, though the thought
wakes woe,
My memory ever abides,
And I mourn for the Times gone long ago,
For the Times of the Barmecides !
I mourn for the Times gone long ago,
For the Times of the Barmecides !”

This is the poem claimed by Mangan to be from the Arabic. I have no means of knowing whether it is or not. There is one translation from the Persian, one from the Ottoman, and according to Mitchel, one from the Coptic. But seeing that he turned into verse a great number of Irish poems from prose translations done by another, and that he did not know a word of that language, I think it may be safely assumed that *The Last of the Barmecides* is original. This poem is so old a favourite of mine that I cannot pretend to be an impartial judge of it. When I hear it (I can never see a poem I know well and love much) I listen as to the unchanged voice of an old friend ; I wander in a maze of memories ; “I see rich Bagdad once again ;” I am once more owner of

the magic carpet, and am floating irresponsibly and at will on the intoxicating atmosphere of the poets over the enchanted groves, and streams, and hills, and seas of fairyland, or harkening to voices that years ago ceased to stir in my ears, gazing at the faces that have long since moulded the face cloth into blunted memories of the face for the grave.

On the 20th of June, 1849, Mangan died in the Meath Hospital, Dublin. Having been born in 1803, he was, in 1849, eight years older than Poe, who died destitute and forlorn at Baltimore in the same year. Both poets had been in abject poverty, both had been unfortunate in love, both had been consummate artists, both had been piteously unlucky in a thousand ways, and both had died the same year, and in common hospitals. Two more miserable stories it is impossible to find anywhere. I would recommend those of sensitive natures to confine their reading to the work these men did, and not to the misfortunes they laboured under, and the follies they committed. I think, of the two, Mangan suffered more acutely ; for

he never rose up in anger against the world, or those around him, but glided like an uncomplaining ghost into the grave, where, long before his death, all his hopes lay buried. He had only a half-hearted pity for himself. Poe, in his *Raven*, is, all the time of his most pathetic and terrible complaining, conscious that he complains as becomes a fine artist. But the raven's croak does not touch the heart. It appeals to the intellect; it affects the fancy the imagination, the ear, the eye. When Mangan opens his bosom and shows you the ravens that prey upon him, he cannot repress something like a laugh at the thought that any one could be interested in him and his woes. See:

THE NAMELESS ONE.

BALLAD.

I.

“Roll forth, my song, like the rushing river,
That sweeps along to the mighty sea;
God will inspire me while I deliver
My soul of thee!

II.

“Tell thou the world, when my bones lie whitening
Amid the last homes of youth and eld,
That there was once one whose veins ran lightning
No eye beheld.

III.

“Tell how his boyhood was one drear night-hour,
How shone for *him*, through his griefs and gloom,
No star of all heaven sends to light our
Path to the tomb.

IV.

“Roll on, my song, and to after ages
Tell how, disdaining all earth can give,
He would have taught men from wisdom's pages
The way to live.

V.

“And tell how, trampled, derided, hated,
And worn by weakness, disease, and wrong,
He fled for shelter to God, who mated
His soul with song—

VI.

“ With song which alway, sublime or vapid,
 Flowed like a rill in the morning beam,
Perchance not deep, but intense and rapid—
 A mountain stream.

VII.

“ Tell how the Nameless, condemned for years long
 To herd with demons from hell beneath,
Saw things that made him, with groans and tears,
 long
 For even death.

VIII.

“ Go on to tell how, with genius wasted,
 Betrayed in friendship, befooled in love,
With spirit shipwrecked and young hopes blasted,
 He still, still strove.

IX.

“ Till, spent with toil, dreeing death for others,
 And some whose hands should have wrought for
 him
(If children live not for sires and mothers),
 His mind grew dim.

X.

“And he fell far through the pit abysmal,
The gulf and grave of Maginn and Burns,
And pawned his soul for the devil’s dismal
Stock of returns.

XI.

“But yet redeemed it in days of darkness,
And shapes and signs of the final wrath,
Where death in hideous and ghastly starkness
Stood in his path.

XII.

“And tell how now, amid wreck and sorrow,
And want and sickness and houseless nights,
He bides in calmness the silent morrow
That no ray lights.

XIII.

“And lives he still, then? Yes! old and hoary
At thirty-nine, from despair and woe,
He lives enduring what future story
Will never know.

XIV.

“Him grant a grave to, ye pitying noble,
Deep in your bosoms ! There let him dwell !
He, too, had tears for all souls in trouble,
Here and in hell.”

The burden of all his song is sad, and in his translations he has chosen chiefly themes which echoed the harpings of his own soul. He began life as a copying clerk in an attorney's office, and had for some time to support wholly, or in the main, a mother and sister. In Mitchel's preface there are many passages almost as fine as the verse of the poet. Here is one, long as it is, that must find a place. Mitchel is speaking of the days when Mangan was in the attorney's office :—

“At what age he devoted himself to this drudgery, at what age he left it, or was discharged from it, does not appear ; for his whole biography documents are wanting, the man having never, for one moment, imagined that his poor life could interest any surviving human being, and having never, accordingly, collected his biographical assets, and appointed a literary executor to take care of his posthumous fame. Neither did he ever acquire the

habit, common enough among literary men, of dwelling upon his own early trials, struggles, and triumphs. But those who knew him in after years can remember with what a shuddering and loathing horror he spoke—when at rare intervals he could be induced to speak at all—of his labours with the scrivener and attorney. He was shy and sensitive, with exquisite sensibilities and fine impulses ; eye, ear, and soul open to all the beauty, music, and glory of heaven and earth ; humble, gentle, and unexacting ; modestly craving nothing in the world but celestial, glorified life, seraphic love, and a throne among the immortal gods (that's all) ; and he was eight or ten years scribbling deeds, pleadings, and bills in Chancery."

There is, I believe, but one portrait of him in existence, and a copy of it hangs on the wall of the room in which I am writing, a few feet in front of my eyes. It is not a face easy to describe. Beauty is the chief characteristic of it. But it is not the beauty that men admire or that inspires love in women. It is not the face of a poet or a visionary or a thinker. There is no passion in it ; not even the passionate sadness of his own verse. It is not the face of a man who has suffered greatly, or rejoiced in ecstasy. It is the face of a

fleshless, worn man of forty, with hair pressed back from the forehead and ear. I have been looking at it for a long time, trying to find out something positive about it, and I have failed. It is not interesting. It is the face of a man who is done with the world and humanity. It is the face of a dead man whose spirit has passed away, while the body remains alive. The eyes are open, and have light in them; the face would be more complete if the light were out, and the lids drawn down and composed for the blind tomb.

He gives ~~a~~ picture of his mental attitude at about the time this portrait was taken :—

TWENTY GOLDEN YEARS AGO.

I.

“ Oh, the rain, the weary, dreary rain,
How it plashes on the window-sill !
Night, I guess too, must be on the wane,
Strass and Gass around are grown so still.
Here I sit with coffee in my cup—
Ah, 'twas rarely I beheld it flow
In the tavern where I loved to sup
Twenty golden years ago !

II.

“Twenty years ago, alas!—but stay—

On my life, 'tis half-past twelve o'clock!
After all, the hours *do* slip away—

Come, here goes to burn another block!
For the night, or morn, is wet and cold;
And my fire is dwindling rather low:
I had fire enough, when young and bold
Twenty golden years ago.

III.

“Dear! I don't feel well at all, somehow:

Few in Weimar dream how bad I am;
Floods of tears grow common with me now,
High-Dutch floods that Reason cannot dam.
Doctors think I'll neither live nor thrive
If I mope at home so—I don't know—
Am I living now? I was alive
Twenty golden years ago.

IV.

“Wifeless, friendless, flagonless, alone,

Not quite bookless, though, unless I choose;
Left with naught to do, except to groan,
Not a soul to woo, except the Muse.
Oh, this is hard for *me* to bear—
Me who whilom lived so much *en haut*—
Me who broke all hearts like china-ware,
Twenty golden years ago.

V.

“ Perhaps ’tis better ;—time’s defacing waves
Long have quenched the radiance of my brow—
They who curse me nightly from their graves
Scarce could love me were they living now ;
But my loneliness hath darker ills—
Such dun duns as Conscience, Thought, & Co.,
Awful Gorgons ! Worse than tailors’ bills
Twenty golden years ago.

VI.

“ Did I paint a fifth of what I feel,
Oh, how plaintive you would ween I was !
But I won’t, albeit I have a deal
More to wail about than Kerner has !
Kerner’s tears are wept for withered flowers ;
Mine for withered hopes ; my scroll of woe
Dates, alas ! from youth’s deserted bowers,
Twenty golden years ago.

VII.

“ Yet, may Deutschland’s bardlings flourish long !
Me, I tweak no beak among them ;—hawks
Must not pounce on hawks : besides, in song
I could once beat all of them by chinks.
Though you find me, as I near my goal,
Sentimentalising like Rousseau,
Oh, I had a great Byronian soul
Twenty golden years ago !

VIII.

“Tick-tick, tick-tick !—not a sound save Time’s,
And the wind gust as it drives the rain—
Tortured torturer of reluctant rhymes,
Go to bed and rest thine aching brain !
Sleep !—no more the dupe of hopes or schemes ;
Soon thou sleepest where the thistles blow ;
Curious anti-climax to thy dreams
Twenty golden years ago !”

I find myself now in a great puzzle. I want, first of all, to say I think it most melancholy that Mangan, when of full age and judgment, should have thought Byron had “a great Byronian soul.” Observe, he does not mean that he had a soul greatly like Byron’s, but that he had a soul like the great soul of Byron. I do not believe Byron had a great soul at all. I believe he was simply a fine stage-manager of melodrama, the finest that ever lived, and that as a property-master he was unrivalled ; but that to please no one, himself included, could he have written the play. I am not descending to so defiling a depth as to talk about plagiarism. What I wish to say is, that whether Byron stole

or not made not the least difference in the world, for he never by the aid of his gifts or his thefts wrote a poem. I wanted further to say of Byron that there was nothing great about him except his vanity. Suddenly I remembered some words of the critic of whom I spoke a while back, in dealing with the question of poetical poetry and poems. I took down the printed page, where I found these lines:—

“Mr. Swinburne’s poetry is almost altogether poetical. Not all the poetry of even the Poets is so, and to one who loves this dear and intimate quality of which we speak, Coleridge, for instance, is a poet of some four poems, Wordsworth of some sixteen, Keats of five, Byron of none, though Byron is *great and eloquent*, but the thing we prize so much is far away from eloquence. Poetical poetry is the inner garden; there grows the ‘flower of the mind.’”

Now, my difficulty is plain. My critic, who is also a poet, says Byron is great, and I find fault with Mangan for saying Byron had a great Byronian soul. Here are two of my select authors against me. Plainly, the best thing I can do is say nothing at all about the matter!

Twenty Golden Years Ago is by no means a poetical poem, but there is poetry in it. There is no poetical poem by Mangan. But he has written no serious verses in which there is not poetry.

After giving Mangan's own verse account of what he was like in his own regard at about forty years of age, I copy what Mitchel saw when the poet was first pointed out to him :—

“Being in the College Library [Trinity, Dublin], and having occasion for a book in that gloomy apartment of the institution called the ‘Fagal Library,’ which is the innermost recess of the stately building, an acquaintance pointed out to me a man perched on the top of a ladder, with the whispered information that the figure was Clarence Mangan. It was an unearthly and ghostly figure, in a brown garment; the same garment (to all appearance), which lasted till the day of his death. The blanched hair was totally unkempt; the corpse-like features still as marble; a large book was in his arms, and all his soul was in the book. I had never heard of Clarence Mangan before, and knew not for what he was celebrated, whether as a magician, a poet, or a murderer; yet took a volume and spread it on a table, not to read, but with the pretence of reading to gaze on the spectral creature on the ladder.”

I never met any one who had known Mangan. Mitchel did not know the name of the woman who lured him on with smiles that seemed to promise love. He always addressed her in his poems as Frances. Some time ago the name of the woman was divulged. It is ungallant of me to have forgotten it, but such is the case. The address at which Mangan visited her was in Mountpleasant Square, Dublin. At the time I saw the name of the lady I looked into a directory of 1848 which I happened to have by me, and found a different name at the address given in the Square. I know the love affair of the poet took place years before his death in 1849, but people in quiet and unpretentious houses in Dublin, or correctly Ranelagh, often live a whole generation in the same house.

Here I find myself in a second puzzle. So long as I thought merely of writing this rambling account of "My Borrowed Poet," I decided upon trying to say something about the stupidity of women and poets in general. But I don't feel in case to do so when I glance up at the face of Mangan hanging on the wall, and bring

myself to realise the fact that this face now looking so dead and unburied was young and bright and perhaps cheerful when he went wooing in Ranelagh.

Instead of saying anything wise and stupid and commonplace about either poets or women, let me quote here stanzas which must have been written some day when he saw sunshine among the clouds:—

THE MARINER'S BRIDE.

“Look, mother! the mariner’s rowing
His galley adown the tide;
I’ll go where the mariner’s going,
And be the mariner’s bride!

“I saw him one day through the wicket,
I opened the gate and we met—
As a bird in the fowler’s net,
Was I caught in my own green thicket.
O mother, my tears are flowing,
I’ve lost my maidenly pride—
I’ll go if the mariner’s going,
And be the mariner’s bride!

“ This Love the tyrant winces,
 Alas ! an omnipotent might,
He darkens the mind like night,
 He treads on the necks of Princes !
O mother, my bosom is glowing,
 I'll go whatever betide,
I'll go where the mariner's going,
 And be the mariner's bride !

“ Yes, mother ! the spoiler has reft me
 Of reason and self-control ;
Gone, gone is my wretched soul,
And only my body is left me !
The winds, O mother, are blowing,
 The ocean is bright and wide ;
I'll go where the mariner's going,
 And be the mariner's bride.”

This appears among the Apocrypha, and is credited by Mangan to the “Spanish ;” but it is safe to assume when he is so vague that the poem is original. It is one of the most bright and cheerful he has given us. The only touch of sorrow we feel is for the poor mother who is about to lose so impulsive and vivacious a daughter. The time of this delightful ballad is not clearly defined, but we may be absolutely

certain that we of this moribund nineteenth century will never meet except at a function of a recondite spiritual medium even the great grandchild of the Mariner's Bride. How much more is our devout gratitude due to a good and pious spiritualist than to any riotous and licentious poet! The former can give us intercourse with the illustrious defunct of history; the latter can give us no more than the image of a figment, the phantom of a shade, the echo of sounds that never vibrated in the ear of man. All persons who believe the evidence adduced by poets are the victims of subornation.

A saw-mill does not seem a good subject for a "copy of verses." Mangan died single and in poverty, and was buried by his friends. Listen :—

THE SAW-MILL.

" My path lay towards the Mourne again,
But I stopped to rest by the hill-side
That glanced adown o'er the sunken glen
Which the Saw- and Water-mills hide,
Which now, as then,
The Saw- and Water-mills hide.

“ And there, as I lay reclined on the hill,
Like a man made by sudden *qualm* ill,
I heard the water in the Water-mill,
And I saw the saw in the Saw-mill !
As I thus lay still
I saw the saw in the Saw-mill !

“ The saw, the breeze, and the humming bees,
Lulled me into a dreamy reverie,
Till the objects round me—hills, mills, trees,
Seemed grown alive all and every—
By slow degrees
Took life as it were, all and every !

“ Anon the sound of the waters grew
To a Mourne-ful ditty,
And the song of the tree that the saw sawed
through
Disturbed my spirit with pity,
Began to subdue
My spirit with tenderest pity !

“ “ Oh, wanderer, the hour that brings thee back
Is of all meet hours the meetest.
Thou now, in sooth art on the Track,
And nigher to Home than thou weetest ;
Thou hast thought Time slack,
But his flight has been of the fleetest !

“ ‘For this it is that I dree such pain
As, when wounded, even a plank will ;
My bosom is pierced, is rent in twain,
That thine may ever bide tranquil.
May ever remain
Henceforward untroubled and tranquil.

“ ‘In a few days more, most Lonely One !
Shall I, as a narrow ark, veil
Thine eyes from the glare of the world and sun
’Mong the urns of yonder dark vale—
In the cold and dun
Recesses of yonder dark vale !

“ ‘For this grieve not ! Thou knowest what thanks
The Weary-souled and Meek owe
To Death !’ I awoke, and heard four planks
Fall down with a saddening echo.
*I heard four planks
Fall down with a hollow echo.”*

This was the epithalamium of James Clarence
Mangan sung by himself.

THE ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER.

I BOUGHT my copy new for fourpence-half-penny, in Holywell Street. It was published by George Routledge and Sons, of the Broadway, London. The little volume is made up of a "Preface," by Thomas de Quincey; "Confessions of an English Opium-eater;" and "Notes from the Pocket-book of a late Opium-eater;" including "Walking Stewart," "On the Knocking at the Gates in *Macbeth*," and "On Suicide." When it last left my hands it boasted a paper cover, on which appeared the head of the illustrious Laker. At my elbow now it lies, divested of its shield; and I sit face to face with the title-page, as though my author had taken off his hat and overcoat, and I were asking him which he preferred, clear or thick soup, while the servant stood behind filling his glass

with Amontillado. How that cover came to be removed I do not know. The last borrower was of the less destructive sex, and I am at a great loss to account for the injury.

I object to the presence of "Walking Stewart," and "On Suicide," otherwise I count my copy perfect. With the exception of *Robinson Crusoe* and Poe's *Tales* I have read nothing so often as the *Opium-eater*. Only twice in my life up to five-and-twenty years of age did I sit up all night to read a book: once when about midnight I came into possession of *Enoch Arden*, and a second time when, at the same witching hour I drew a red cloth-bound edition of the *Opium-eater* out of my pocket, in my lonely, dreary bedroom, five hundred miles from where I am now writing. The household were all asleep, and I by no means strong of nerve. The room was large, the dwelling ghostly. I sat in an embrasure of one of the windows, with a little table supporting the candles on one side, and on the other a small movable book-case. Thus I was in a kind of dock, only open on one side, that fronting the room. It was in

the beginning of autumn, and a low, warm wind blew the complaining rain against the pane on a level with my ear. At that time I had not seen London, and I remember being overpowered and broken before the spectacle of that sensitive and imaginative boy in the text, hungry and forlorn, in the unsympathetic mass of innumerable houses, every door of which was shut against him.

As I read on and the hour grew late, the succession of splendours and terrors wrought on my imagination, until I felt cold and exhausted, and had scarcely strength to sit upright in my chair. My hand trembled, and my mind became tremulously apprehensive of something vague and awful; I could not tell what. Sounds of the night which I had heard a thousand times before, which were as familiar to me as the bell of my parish church, now assumed dire, uncertain imports. The rattling of the sash was not the work of the wind, not the work of ghostly hands, but worse still, of human hands belonging to men in some more dire extremity than the approach of death. The beat-

ing of the rain against the glass was made to cover voices trying to tell me secrets I could not hear and live, and which yet I would have given my life to know.

I cannot tell why I was so exhilarated by terror. The *Confessions* alone are not calculated to produce inexplicable disturbance of the mind. It may be I had eaten little or nothing that day; it may be I had steeped myself too deeply in nicotine. All I know for certain is that I was in such a state of abject panic I had not courage to cross the room to my bed. It was in the dreary, pitiless, raw hour before the dawn I finished the book. Then I found I durst not rise. I put down the book and looked at the candles. They would last till daylight.

I would have given all the world to lie on that bed over there, with my back secure against it, warmed by it, comforted by it. But that open space was more terrible to me than if it were filled with flame. I should have been much more at my ease in the dark, yet I could not bring myself to blow out the lights;

not because I dreaded the darkness, but because I shrank from encountering the possibilities of that awful moment of twilight between the full light of the candles and the blank gloom.

When I thought of blowing out the lights and imagined the dread of catching a glimpse of some spectacle of supreme horror, I imprudently gave my imagination rein, and set myself to find out what would terrify me most. All at once, and before I had made more than the inquiry of my mind, I saw in fancy between me and the bed, a thing of unapproachable terror; I had not been recently reading *Christabel*, and yet it must have been remotely from that poem I conjured the spectre which so awed me. I placed out in the open of the room on the floor, between me and the door, and close to a straight line drawn between me and the bed, a figure shrouded in a black cloak, from hidden shoulder to invisible feet. Over the head of this figure was cast a cowl, which completely concealed the head and face. At any moment the cloak might open and disclose the body of that figure. I knew the body

of that figure was a "thing to dream of, not to see." I felt sure I should lose my reason if the cloak opened and discovered the loathsome body. I had no idea what I should see, but I knew I should go mad.

In my dock by the window, and with the light behind my eyes I felt secure. But at that moment no earthly consideration, no consideration whatever, would have induced me to face that ghostly form in the flicker of expiring light. I was not under any delusion. I knew then as well as I know now that there was no object on which the normal human eye could exercise itself between me and the bed. I deliberately willed the figure to appear, and although once I had summoned it I could not dismiss it, I had complete and self-possessed knowledge that I saw nothing with my physical eye. Moreover, full of potentiality for terror as that figure was in its present shape and attitude, it had no dread for me. I was fascinated by considering possibilities which I knew could not arise so long as the present circumstances remained unchanged. In

other words, I knew I could trust my reason to keep my imagination in subjection, so long as my senses were not confused or my attention scared. If I attempted to extinguish the candles that figure might waver! if I moved across the floor it might get behind my back, and as I caught sight of it over my shoulder, the cloak might fall aside! Then I should go mad. Thus I sat and waited until daylight came. Then I fell asleep in my chair.

As I have said, the copy of the *Opium-eater* I then had was bound in red cloth. It was a much handsomer book than the humble one published by Routledge. Since that memorable night many years ago in my high, dreary, lonely bedroom, I cannot tell you all the copies of the *Opium-eater* which have been mine. I remember another, bound in dark blue cloth, with copious notes. There was a third, the outside seeming of which I forget, but which I think formed part of two volumes of selections from De Quincey. I love my little sixpenny volume for one reason chiefly. I can lend it without fear, and lose it without a pang.

Why, the beggarliest miser alive can't think much of fourpence-halfpenny! I have already dispensed a few copies of the *Opium-eater*, price fourpence-halfpenny. As it lies on my table now, I take no more care of it than one does of yesterday's morning paper. When I read it I double it back, to show to myself how little I value the gross material of the book. Any one coming in likely to appreciate the book, and who has not read it is welcome to carry it off as a gift. Yet if I am free with the volume, I am jealous of the author. I do not mention his name to people I believe unwilling or unable to worship him becomingly.

But when I meet a true disciple what prodigal joy environs and suffuses me! What talks of him I have had, and speechless raptures in hearing of him! How thick with gold the air of evenings has been, spent with him and one who loved him! I recall one glorious summer's day, when an old friend and I (we were then, alas! years and years younger than we are to-day), had toiled on through mountain heather for hours, until we were half-

baked by the sun and famished with thirst. Suddenly we came upon the topmost peak of all the hills, and saw, many miles away, the unexpected sea. As we stood, shading our eyes with our hands, my companion chanted out, "Obliquely to the right lay the many-languaged town of Liverpool; obliquely to the left 'the multitudinous sea.'" "Whose is that?" I asked eagerly, notwithstanding my drought. "What isn't Shakespeare's is De Quincey's." "Where did you find it?" "In the *Opium-eater*." I remember cursing my memory because I had forgotten that passage. When I got home I looked through the copy I then had, and could not find the sentence. I wrote to my friend, saying I could not come upon his quotation. He answered that he now believed it did not occur in the body of the *Confessions*, but in a note in some edition, he could not remember which. What a sense of miserable desolation I had that this edition had never come my way!

There are only three marks of any kind in my present copy of the *Confessions*, one dealing

with the semi-voluntary power children have over the coming and going of phantoms painted on the darkness. This mark is very indistinct, and, as I remember nothing about it, I think it must have been made by accident. The part indicated by it is only introductory to an unmarked passage immediately following which has always fascinated my imagination. It is in the "Pains of Opium," and runs :—

"In the middle of 1817, I think it was, that this faculty became positively distressing to me: at night, when I lay awake in bed, vast processions passed along in mournful pomp, friezes of never-ending stories, that to my feelings were as sad and solemn as if they were stories drawn from times before *Ædipus* and *Priam*—before *Tyre*—before *Memphis*. And at the same time a corresponding change took place in my dreams: a theatre seemed suddenly opened and lighted up within my brain, which presented nightly spectacles of more than earthly splendour."

How thankful we ought to be that it has never been our fate to sit in that awful theatre of prehistoric woes! There is surely nothing more appalling in the past than the interminably vain activities of that mysterious

atomie, Egyptian man. Who could bear to look upon the three hundred thousand ant-like slaves swarming among the colossal monoliths piled up in thousands for the pyramid of Cheops! The bare thought makes one start back aghast and shudder.

I find the next mark opposite another awful passage dealing with infinity, on this occasion infinity of numbers, not of time:—

“The waters now changed their character,—from translucent lakes, shining like mirrors, they now became seas and oceans. And now came a tremendous change, which, unfolding itself slowly like a scroll, through many months, promised an abiding torment; and, in fact, it never left me until the winding-up of my case. Hitherto the human face had mixed often in my dreams, but not despotically, not with any special power of tormenting. But now, that which I have called the tyranny of the human face began to unfold itself. Perhaps some part of my London life might be answerable for this. Be that as it may, now it was that upon the rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to appear: the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens—faces imploring, wrathful, despairing, surged upwards by thousands, by myriads, by generations, by centuries.”

Upon closer looking, I see an attempt has been made to erase the mark opposite this passage. Joining the fact with the faintness of the line opposite the former quotation I am driven to the conclusion that there is only one "stetted" note of admiration in the book. It is a whole page of the little volume. It begins on page 91, and ends on page 92. To show you how little I care for my copy of the *Confessions*, I shall cut it out. Even a lawyer would pay me more than fourpence-halfpenny for copying a page of the book, and, as I have said before, the volume has no extrinsic value for me. Excepting the Bible, I am not familiar with any finer passage of so great length in prose in the English language:—

"The dream commenced with a music which now I often heard in dreams; a music of preparation and awakening suspense; a music like the opening of the Coronation Anthem, and which, like *that*, gave the feeling of a vast march—of infinite cavalcades filing off—and the tread of innumerable armies. The morning was come of a mighty day—a day of crisis and of final hope for human nature, then suffering some mysterious eclipse, and labouring in some dread extremity. Some-

where, I knew not where—somehow, I knew not how—by some beings, I knew not whom—a battle, a strife, an agony was conducting, was evolving like a great drama, or piece of music ; with which my sympathy was the more insupportable from my confusion as to its place, its cause, its nature, and its possible issue. I, as is usual in dreams (where, of necessity, we make ourselves central to every movement), had the power and yet had not the power, to decide it. I had the power, if I could raise myself, to will it ; and yet again had not the power, for the weight of twenty Atlantics was upon me, or the oppression of inexpiable guilt. ‘ Deeper than ever plummet sounded,’ I lay inactive. Then, like a chorus, the passion deepened. Some greater interest was at stake ; some mightier cause than ever yet the sword had pleaded or trumpet had proclaimed. Then came sudden alarms ; hurryings to and fro ; trepidations of innumerable fugitives, I knew not whether from the good cause or the bad ; darkness and lights ; tempest and human faces ; and at last, with the sense that all was lost, female forms, and the features that were all the world to me, and but a moment allowed, and clasped hands, and heart-breaking partings, and then—everlasting farewells ! and with a sigh such as the caves of hell sighed when the incestuous mother uttered the abhorred name of death, the sound was reverberated—everlasting farewells ! and again and yet again reverberated—everlasting farewells ! And I awoke in struggles, and cried aloud, ‘ I will sleep no more ! ’ ”

Upon reading this passage over I am glad I am not familiar with any finer one in English prose—it would be impossible to endure it. In these sentences it is not the consummate style alone that overwhelms one, the matter is nearly as fine as the manner. How tremendously the numbers and sentences are marshalled! How inevitable, overbearing, breathless is the onward movement! What awful expectations are aroused, and shadowy fears vaguely realized! As the spectral pageant moves on other cohorts of trembling shades join the ghostly legion on the blind march! All is vaporous, spectral, spiritual, until when we are wound up to the highest pitch of physical awe and apprehension, we stop suddenly, arrested by failure of the ground, insufficiency of the road, and are recalled to life and light and truth and fellowship with the kindly race of man by the despairing human shriek of incommunicable, inarticulable agony in the words, “I will sleep no more!” In that despairing cry the tortured soul abjectly confesses that it has been vanquished and driven wild by the spirit-world.

It is when you contrast the finest passages in Macaulay with such a passage as this, that you recognise the difference between a clever writer and a great stylist.

A GUIDE TO IGNORANCE.

FOR a long time I have had it in my mind to write a guide to ignorance. I have been withheld partly by a feeling of diffidence and partly by a want of encouragement from those to whom I mentioned the scheme. I have submitted a plan of my book to a couple of publishers, but each of these assured me that such a work would not be popular. In their straightforward commercial way they told me they could see "no money in the idea." I differ from them; I think the book would be greeted with acclaim and bought with avidity.

Novelties are, I know, always dangerous speculations except in the form of clothes, when they are certain of instant and immense adoption. The mind of man cannot conceive the

pattern for trousers' cloth or the design for a bonnet that will not be worn. There is nothing too high or too low to set the fashion to men and women in dress. Conquerors were crowned with mural wreaths, of which the chimney-pot hat is the lineal descendant; pigs started the notion of wearing rings in their noses, and man in the southern seas followed the example; kangaroos were the earliest pouch-makers and ladies took to carrying reticules.

But an innovation in the domain of education or thought is a widely different thing from a frolic in gear. It is easy to set going any craze which depends merely or mostly on the way of wearing the hair or the height of the cincture. Hence æstheticism gained many followers in a little time. But remember it took ages and ages to reconcile people to wearing any clothes at all. Once you break the ice the immersion in a new custom may become as rapid as the descent of a round shot into the sea. The great step was, so to speak, from woad to wampum, with just an Atlantic

of time between the two. If you went to Poole any day this week and asked him to make you a suit of wampum he would plead no insuperable difficulty. If you asked him to make you a suit of woad he would certainly detain you while he inquired as to your sanity and sent for your friends. Yet it is only one step, one film, from woad to wampum.

Up to this time in the history of man there has, with few exceptions, been an infatuated pursuit of this will-o'-the wisp, knowledge. Why should not man now turn his glance to ignorance, if it were only for a little while and for the sake of fair play? The idea is of course revolutionary, so also is every other new idea revolutionary, and (I am not now referring to politics) it is only from revolutionary ideas we derive what we regard as advantages. The earth and heavens themselves are revolutionary. Why then should we not fairly examine the chance of a revolution in the aim of man?

The disinclination to face new attitudes of thought comes from the inherent laziness of man, and hence at the outset of my career

towards that guide I should find nearly the whole race against me. Humboldt, who met people of all climes and races and colours, declares laziness to be the most common vice of human nature. Hence the initial obstacle is almost insuperable. But it is only almost, not quite insuperable. Men can be stirred from indolence only by a prospect of profit in some form. Even in the Civil Service they are incited to make the effort to continue living by the hope of greater leisure later in life, for with years comes promotion and promotion means less labour.

By a little industry in the pursuit of ignorance greater repose would be attained in the immediate future. It would be very difficult to prove that up to this hour progress has been of the slightest use or pleasure to man. Higher pleasures, higher pains. Complexities of consciousness are merely a source of distraction from centralisation. The jelly fish may, after all, be the highest ideal of living things, and we may, if the phrase be admitted, have been developing backward from him. Of all the creatures on earth man is the most stuck

up. He arrogates everything to himself and because he can split a flint or make a bow or gun-barrel he thinks he centres the universe, and insists that the illimitable deeps of space are focussed upon him. Astronomers, a highly respectable class of people, assert there are now visible to us one hundred million fixed stars, one hundred million suns like our own. Each may have its system of planets, such as earth, and each planet again its attendant satellites. With that splendid magnanimity characteristic of our race, man would rather pitch the hundred million suns into chaos than for a moment entertain the idea that he is a humbug and of no use whatever. And yet after all the jelly-fish may be a worthier fellow than the best of us.

I do not of course insist on reversion to the jelly-fish. In this climate his habits of life are too suggestive of ague and rheumatism. In fact I do not know that I am urging reversion to anything, even to the flocks of pastoral man. But I am saying that as myriads of facilities are given for acquiring

knowledge, one humble means ought to be devised for acquiring ignorance. If I had anywhere met with the encouragement which I think I merited, I should have undertaken to write the book myself.

I should open by saying it was not until I had concluded a long and painful investigation that I considered myself in any way qualified to undertake so grave and important a task as writing a guide to ignorance: that I had not only inquired curiously into my own fitness, but had also looked about carefully among my friends in the hope of finding some one better qualified to carry out this important undertaking. But upon gauging the depth of my own knowledge and considering conscientiously the capacity of my acquaintances, I came to the conclusion that no man I knew personally had so close a personal intimacy with ignorance as myself. There are few branches, I may say no branch, of knowledge except that of ignorance in which any one of my friends was not more learned than myself. I was born in such profound ignorance

that I had no personal knowledge of the fact at the time. I had existed for a long time before I could distinguish between myself and things which were not.

As a boy I was averse from study; and since I have grown to manhood I have acquired so little substantive information that I could write down in a bold hand on one page of this book every single fact, outside facts of personal experience, of which I am possessed.

I know that the Norman invasion occurred in 1066, and the Great Fire in 1666. I know that gunpowder is composed of saltpetre, sulphur, and charcoal, and sausages of minced meat and bread under the name of Tommy. I am aware Milton and Shakespeare were poets, and that needle-grinders are short lived. I know that the primest brands of three-shilling champagnes are made in London. I can give the Latin for seven words, and the French for four. I can repeat the multiplication table (with the pence) up to six times. I know the mere names of a number of people and things; but, as far as clear and definite information goes, I don't believe I could

double the above brief list. I am, I think, therefore, warranted in concluding that few men can have a more close or exhaustive personal acquaintance with ignorance. If you want learning at secondhand you must go to the learned : if you want ignorance at first hand you cannot possibly do better than come to me.

In the first place let us consider the "Injury of Knowledge." How much better off the king would be if he had no knowledge ! Suppose his mental ken had never been directed to any period before the dawn of his own memory, he would have no disquieting thoughts of the trouble into which Charles I. or Richard II. drifted. He would be filled with no envy of the good old King John, who, from four or five ounces of iron in the form of thumb-screws, and a few hundredweight of rich Jew, filled up the royal pockets as often as they showed any signs of growing empty. And, above all, he would be spared the misery of committing dates to memory. How it must limit the happiness of a constitutional sovereign to know anything about the constitution ! Why should he be

burdened with the consciousness of rights and prerogatives? Would he not be much happier if he might smoke his cigar in his garden without the fear of the Speaker or the Lord Chancellor before his eyes? The Commons want their Speaker, the Lords want their Lord Chancellor—let them have them. The king wants neither. Why should he be troubled with any knowledge of either? Although he is a king is he not a man and a brother also? Why should he be worried out of his life with reasons for all he does? The king feels he can do no wrong. That ought to be enough for him. Most men believe the same thing of themselves, but few others share the faith. The king can do no wrong, then in mercy's name let the man alone. Suppose it is a part of my duty to look out of the oriel window at dawn, noon, and sunset, why should I be bored with cause, reason, and precedent for this? Let me look out of window if it is my duty to do so; but, before and after looking out of the window, let me enjoy my life.

Take the statesman. How knowledge must

hamper him ! He is absolutely precluded from acting with decision by the consciousness of the difficulties which lay in the path of his predecessors. He has to make up his subject, to get facts and figures from his subordinates and others. He has to arrange the party manœuvres before he launches his scheme, by which time all the energy is gone out of him, and he has not half as much faith in his bill as if he had never looked at the *pros* and *cons*. "Never mind manœuvring, but go at them," said Nelson. The moment you begin to manœuvre you confess your doubtfulness of success, unless you can take your adversary at a disadvantage ; but if you fly headlong at his throat, you terrify him by the display of your confidence and valour.

The words of Nelson apply still more closely to the general. His knowledge that fifty years ago the British army was worsted on this field, unnerves, paralyses him. If he did not know that shells are explosive and bullets deadly, he would make his dispositions with twice the confidence, and his temerity would fill the foe

with panic. His simple duty is to defeat the enemy, and knowing anything beyond this only tends to distract his mind and weaken his arm. In the middle of one of his Indian battles, and when he thought the conflict had been decided in favour of British arms, a messenger rode hastily up to the general in command, who was wiping his reeking forehead on his coat-sleeve: "A large fresh force of the enemy has appeared in such a place; what is to be done?" Gough rubbed his forehead with the other sleeve, and shouted out, "Beat 'em!" Obviously no better command could have been given. What the English nation wanted the English army to do with the enemy was to "beat 'em." In the pictures of the Victoria Cross there is one of a young dandy officer with an eyeglass in his eye and a sword in his hand, among the thick of the foe. He knows he is in that place to kill some one. He is quite ignorant of the fact that the enemy is there to kill him, and he is taking his time and looking through his eyeglass to try to find some enticing man through whom to run his sword. One of

Wellington's most fervent prayers was, "Oh, spare me my dandy officers!" Now dandies are never very full of knowledge, and yet the greatest Duke thought more of them than of your learning-begrimed sappers or your science-bespattered gunners.

If an advocate at the bar knew one quarter of the law of the land, he could never get on. In the first place, he would know more than the judges, and this would prejudice the bench against him. With regard to a barrister, the best position for him to assume, if he is addressing a jury, is, "Gentlemen, the indisputable facts of the case, as stated to you by the witnesses, are so-and-so. In presence of so distinguished a lawyer as occupies the bench in this court, I do not feel myself qualified to tell you what the law is; that will be the easy duty of his lordship." Even in Chancery cases, the barrister would best insure success by merely citing the precedent cases, in an off-hand way, "Does not your lordship think the case of *Burke v. Hare* meets the exact conditions of the one under consideration?" The indices

are all the pleader need look at. The judge will surely strain a point for one who does not bore him with extracts and arguments, but leaves all to himself, and lets the work of the court run smoothly and just as the president wishes.

Knowledge is an absolute hindrance to the doctor of medicine. Supposing he is a man of average intelligence (some doctors are), he is able to diagnose, let me say, fever. You or I could diagnose fever pretty well—quick pulse, dry skin, thirst, and so on. But as the doctor leans over the patient, he is paralysed by the complication of his knowledge. Such a theory is against feeding up, such a theory against slops, such a theory against bleeding, such a theory in favour of phlebotomy; there are the wet and the dry, the hot and the cold methods; and while the doctor is deliberating, vacillating, or speculating, the patient has ample opportunity of dying, or nature of stepping in and curing the man, and thus foiling the doctor. Is there not much more sense and candour in the method adopted by the Irish hunting

dispensary doctor, who, before starting with the hounds, locked up all drugs, except the Glauber's salts, a stone or two of which he left in charge of his servant, with instructions it was to be meted out impartially to all comers, each patient receiving an honest fistful as a dose? It is a remarkable fact that within this century homœopathy has gained a firm hold on an important section of the community, and yet, notwithstanding the growth of what the allopathists or regular profession regard as ignorant quackery, the span of human life has had six years added to it in eighty years. Still homœopathy is a practical confession of ignorance; for it says, in effect, "We don't know exactly what Nature is trying to do, but let us give her a little help, and trust in luck." Whereas allopathy pretended to know everything and to fight Nature. Here, in the result of years added to man's life by the development of the ignorant system, we see once more the superiority of ignorance over knowledge.

How full of danger to the unwedded men is knowledge owned by the widow! She has

knowledge of the married state, in which she was far removed from all the troubles and responsibilities of life. She had her pin-money, her bills paid, stalls taken for her at the opera, agreeable company around her board, no occasion to face money difficulties. Now all that is changed. There is no elasticity in her revenue, no margin for the gratification of her whims; she has to pay her own bills, secure her own stalls; she cannot very well entertain company often, and all the unpleasantnesses of business matters press her sorely. Her knowledge tells her that, if she could secure a second husband, all would be pleasant again. It may be said that here knowledge is in favour of the widow. Yes; but it is against the "Community." Remember, the "Community" is always a male.

There is hardly any class or member of the community that does not suffer drawback or injury from knowledge. As I am giving only a crude outline of a design, I leave a great deal to the imagination of the reader. He will easily perceive how much happier and more free would be the man of business, the girl, the boy,

the scientist, the controversialist, and, above all, the literary man, if each knew little or nothing, instead of having pressed upon the attention from youth accumulated experiences, traditions, discoveries, and reasonings of many centuries.

To the "Delights of Ignorance," I should devote the consideration of man devoid of knowledge under various circumstances and in various positions.

By the sea who does not love to lie "propt on beds of amaranth and moly, how sweet (while warm airs lull, blowing lowly), with half-dropt eyelids still, beneath a heaven dark and holy, to watch the long bright river drawing slowly his waters from the purple hill—to hear the dewy echoes calling from cave to cave through the thick-twined vine—to watch the emerald-coloured waters falling through many a woven acanthus wreath divine ! Only to see and hear the far-off sparkling brine, only to hear were sweet, stretched out beneath the pine." Just so ! Is not that much better than bothering about gravitation and that wretched old clinker the

moon, and the tides, and how sea-water is made up of oxygen and hydrogen and chloride of sodium and bromide of something else, and fifty other things, not one of which has a tolerable smell when you meet it in a laboratory? Isn't it better than thinking of the number of light-houses built on the coast of Albion, and the tonnage which yearly is reported and cleared at the custom-houses of London, Liverpool, and that prosperous seaport of Bohemia! Isn't it much better than improving the occasion by reading a hand-book on hydraulics or hydrostatics? Who on the seashore wants to know anything? There will always, down to the last syllable of recorded time, be finer things unknown about the sea than can be said about all other matters in the world. Trying to know anything about the sea is like shooting into the air an arrow attached to a pennyworth of string with a view to sounding space. If we threw all the knowledge we have into the ocean the Admiralty standards of high-water mark would not have to be altered one-millionth part of a line.

What a blessing ignorance would be in

an inn ! Who would not dispense with a knowledge of all the miseries that follow in the wake of the vat when one is thirsty, and has before him amber sunset-coloured ale, and in his hand a capacious, long, cool-meaning churchwarden ? Who would at such a moment cumber his mind with the unit of specific gravity used by excisemen in testing beer ? Who would at such a moment care to calculate the toll exacted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer before each cool gulp may thrill with amazing joy the parched gullet ?

Who, when upon a journey, would care to know the precise pressure required to blow the boiler of the engine to pieces, or the number of people killed in collisions during the corresponding quarter of last year ? Should we not be better in sickness for not knowing the exact percentage of deaths in cases of our class ? In adversity should we not be infinitely happier were we in ignorance of the chance we ran of gaining a good position or of cutting our throats ? Should we not enjoy our prosperity all the more if we were not, morning

and evening, exercised by the fluctuations of the share-list, fluctuations in all likelihood destined never to increase or diminish our fortunes one penny ? And oh, for ignorance in sleep ! For sleep without dream, or nightmare, or memory ! For sleep such as falls upon the body when the soul is done with it and away !

But all this is only rambling talk and likely to come to nothing. I fear I shall never find a publisher for my great work. Upon reading over what I have written I am impressed by the faintness of the outline it displays of the book. In fact there is hardly any outline at all. It is no more clear than the figures thrown by a magic-lantern upon a fog. I have done nothing more than wave the sacred lamp of ignorance before your eyes. I daresay my friend the jelly-fish would shake his fat sides with laughter if he became aware of this futile effort to show how far we are removed from his state of blissful calm. I feel infinitely depressed and discouraged. I feel that not only will I not be hailed as a prophet in my own

country, but that the age will have nothing to do with my scheme. It may be thought by many that there is something like treason in thus enrolling oneself under the banner of the jelly-fish. Egypt, Assyria, Greece, Carthage, and Rome have gone back from knowledge, and even the jelly-fish does not flourish on their sites. But is the condition of their sites the worse for lacking the jelly-fish? Perhaps the "silence, and desolation, and dim night" are better in those places than the blare of trumpets and the tramp of man. So far as we know man is the only being capable of doing evil or offending heaven. His absence may by nature be considered very good company. Whatever part of earth he can handle and move he has turned topsy-turvy. One day earth will turn on him and wipe him out altogether.

For me and my great scheme for the book there is no hope. Man has always been accounted a poor creature when judged by a fellow man whom he does not appreciate. How can I be expected to go on taking an interest in

man when not the most credulous or the most crafty publisher in London will as much as look at my *Guide to Ignorance*? I feel that my life is wasted and that my functions have been usurped by the School Board. I cool the air with sighs for the days when a philosopher might teach his disciples in the porch or the grove. I feel as if I could anticipate earth and turn on man. But some of the genial good nature of the jelly-fish still lingers in my veins. I will not finally desert man until man has finally deserted me. I had by me a few scattered essays in the style of the book I projected in vain. If in them the reader has not found ample proof of my fitness to inculcate the philosophy of Ignorance I shall abandon Man to his fate. I have relieved my mind of some of its teeming store of vacuity. I can scarcely hope I have added to the reader's hoard. But it would be consoling to fancy that upon laying down this book the reader's mind will if possible be still more empty than when he took it up.

RICHARD CLAY AND SONS,
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